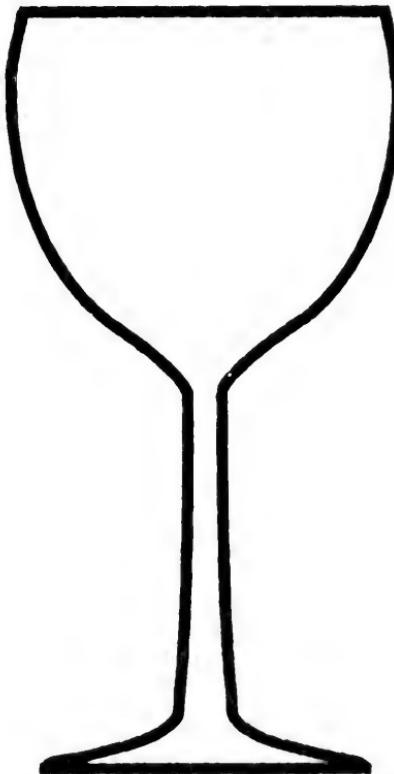


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gelées



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# PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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# Theory and its Double: Ideology and Ideograph in Orientalist Theory

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*Christopher Bush*

One understands more readily why jubilation attended to the theoretical among the Greeks: they had solved the problem until philosophers came along and attempted to ground everything in sense perception, in æsthetic, with a theorizing of their own, appropriated from the polis in ways as yet little understood, as the sole mediation.

—Wlad Godzich

## *I. Orientalism and its Discontents*

Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than with ‘our’ world.

—Edward Said

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is widely considered the starting point for all critical discussions of East-West literary relations. In this text Said argues that the Western political domination of the Orient was greatly assisted by a textualization process involving two major stages. First, “the Orient” itself was ordered and catalogued by expeditions, then transcribed into Western museums and historical discourses. As this essentially textual body was established, Said argues, the study of the Orient developed into the refinement of ignorance, a self-perpetuating body of knowledge which increasingly detached itself from its ostensible object of study (Said 62). Because “the Orient” was a set of textual practices, a Westerner could become an expert Orientalist without ever leaving home. James Clifford's break-down of Said's own multi-part definition of Orientalism outlines the fundamental ambiguity of *Orientalism's* approach:

... in the first and third of Said's 'meanings' Orientalism is concerned with something called the Orient, while in the second the Orient exists merely as the construct of a questionable mental operation. This ambivalence, which sometimes becomes a confusion, informs much of Said's argument. ... Said's concept of a 'discourse' vacillates between, on the one hand, the status of an ideological distortion of lives and cultures ... and, on the other, the condition of a persistent structure of signifiers that ... refers solely and endlessly to itself. (260)

Critical responses to *Orientalism* have been extensive and will not be rehearsed here.<sup>1</sup> The two main criticisms which are important to point out in this context are: (1) Said's failure to be consistently textual in his analyses, and (2) his tendency to overgeneralize about the discourses he is critiquing.

In terms of the first point, one could cite, for example, Said's conscious exclusion, based on Germany's relative lack of colonial activity, of the substantial body of German language work on the Orient. This omission is particularly important given the extent to which the German tradition provided the philosophical framework and philological underpinnings for much of the work Said does discuss. It would obviously be unfair to reproach anyone for failing to achieve universal, encyclopedic coverage of Orientalist scholarship, but the lacuna is significant to the extent that, despite gestures towards a textual definition of Orientalism, Said's study ultimately attempts to ground itself in an *experience* of the Orient.

It is no doubt true that, as Said writes, the Orient was orientalized because it could be. But this presupposes that the desire to orientalize pre-existed "the Orient" itself. If the construction of the Orient is in some sense an epiphenomenon, then, following through on the implications of Said's own argument, we must move beyond understanding Orientalist discourse merely as a foreign entity imposed upon the East. Rather, we must understand "the East" as an externalization, for lack of a better word, of tendencies "native" to the structure of certain cultural practices which identify themselves as Western. Thus while Said makes an original and important move away from empiricist models, his own insight calls for a supplementary analysis. It is as if Said has said, "Aha, you are suffering from a hallucination," but then fails to supplement his history of the hallucination with a history of the

illness, much less tackle the problem of how symptoms are or are not related to illnesses. It is not enough to know that the "real" Orient was disfigured—we must consider in greater depth the nature of the figuration, the face which would have been imposed upon it.

Clifford writes that:

the key issue raised by *Orientalism* concerns the status of *all* forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien. Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing in the making of interpretive statements about foreign cultures and traditions? If so, how? (261)

A further question poses itself: can one ultimately escape procedures of "dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing" in the making of interpretive statements about *any* culture or tradition—most especially one's "own"? If so, how? *Orientalism* fails to relate its critique of orientalizing figures to a broader theory of figural language.

This lack of a broader theory of signification is related to our second criticism, *Orientalism*'s tendency to overgeneralize. One could well argue, for example, that the implicit violence of the "textualization" implied by Said is a basic technique of the human sciences, even one necessarily employed by Said himself. The text fails to make clear whether it is criticizing the politics of scholarly discourse in general, or whether it truly sees these methodologies as being in some sense peculiar to Orientalism. Orientalism is, as Clifford writes, "at times conflated with Western positivism, with general definitions of the primitive, with evolutionism, with racism. One could continue the list" (271).

Lisa Lowe has similarly criticized Said's book for overgeneralizing about oppressor, oppressed, and the discourses separating and connecting them. She argues:

for a conception of orientalism as heterogeneous and contradictory . . . it is necessary to revise and render more complex the thesis that an ontology of Occident and Orient appears in a consistent manner throughout all cultural and historical moments, for the operation that leads to any discourse risks

misrepresenting far more heterogeneous conditions and operations. (Lowe 5-6)

Lowe's general point is very important in that a monolithic description of Orientalist discourses is indeed inadequate since it tends to reimpose the very fiction of Western homogeneity which it ought to be critiquing. It is precisely the persistent importance of Orientalism that is the clearest symptom of the West's lack of such a stable identity. Yet Lowe's approach risks making the term "Orientalism" meaningless—or rather involves a misconstruing of how meaning works. The appropriateness of the generalizing term "Orientalist" for describing diverse discourses can be determined not only by measuring it against the object of those discourses, but also by comparing them to each other. It is precisely because "the Orient" has been so many different places, things, and traditions that we can see that the history of the word has and will continue to sustain the history of the "idea." In short, I am suggesting a rhetorical analysis as a way of explaining the functional unity of a group of texts which are, indeed, widely divergent in subject matter and discursive formation. My goal is not to reduce Orientalism to a single trope, but rather open up the relationship between "the Orient" and certain general theoretical problems, preserving the tension between "theoretical" and "social-historical" issues in such a way that we can begin to understand Orientalism in terms which are not monolithic and yet account for the monolithic qualities of the fantasy.

I find Lowe's own remark that "orientalism may well be an apparatus through which a variety of concerns with difference is figured" a suggestive and useful generalization in this context, especially considering the importance of "difference" in recent critical and literary debates (8). It is indeed very often "the Orient" which is represented (or escapes representation) as the site of difference. Although, as Clifford notes:

it is less common today than it once was to speak of 'the East' . . . we still make casual reference to 'the West,' 'Western culture,' and so on. Even theorists of discontinuity and deconstruction such as Foucault and Derrida continue to set their analyses within and against a Western totality. (272)

In short, critical theory and Orientalism are by no means mutually exclusive.

Consider, for example, Kristeva's *Des chinoises* (1974), a now almost infamous example of how *not* to write about other cultures. In this text Kristeva attempts to develop a quasi-psychanalytic paradigm to describe both the history and structure of Chinese culture, creating "a deliberate confusion and conflation of the paradigms of individual psychology and language acquisition, the history of language and civilization" (Lowe 148-49). Confucius is cast in the role of a Plato-Oedipus figure, whose work inflicted metaphysics upon his culture and, when the time came, brought repression into the lives of its individuals. Yet, according to Kristeva, Confucianism remained a quasi-foreign influence on Chinese culture, one which, unlike Western Platonism, never fully took root. Kristeva's China is both anti-Platonic and anti-Oedipal. It is with good reason therefore that Lowe critically views this construction of China as a displacement of the failed utopian impulses of French '68 politics:

In this sense all three figurations of China—as feminist, psychoanalytic, and leftist utopias—were indirect responses to the events of 1968; they attempted to continue the project of cultural politics begun in 1968, but in choosing to constitute as utopian a revolutionary experience outside Europe, they betrayed their disillusionment at the suppression of the French revolts. (140)

Most relevant in this context, however, are Lowe's remarks about general problems in Kristeva's (and other critics') methodology.<sup>2</sup> Lowe's "ultimate aim is to challenge and resist the binary logic of otherness by historicizing the critical strategy of identifying otherness as a discursive mode of production itself" (29). Regarding the text's two-part structure, Lowe observes that "the structuralist method utilized . . . constitutes the binary oppositions it ostensibly identifies" (142). Lowe reminds us, in short, that critical language is as performative as it is analytic.

Lowe's general conclusion is that the case of Kristeva "cautions us, as contemporary readers, to theorize our own positions and to scrutinize the logic through which we formulate our criticisms" (21). Perhaps no other individual has done this as thoroughly, specifically in the context of East-West literary relations, as

Gayatri Spivak. Spivak's general evaluation of French theory's treatment of non-Western cultures seems particularly pointed in Kristeva's case:

In spite of their occasional interest in touching the *other* of the West, of metaphysics, of capitalism, their repeated question is obsessively self-centered: if we are not what official history and philosophy say we are, who then are we (not), how are we (not)? ("French Feminism" 137)

Contrasting Kristeva's critical writings with the more systematically deconstructive texts of Derrida and Cixous, Spivak writes:

Kristeva's project, however, has been, not to *deconstruct* the origin, but rather to *recuperate*, archeologically and formulaically, what she locates as the potential originary space *before* the sign. Over the years this space has acquired names and inhabitants related to specific ideological sets . . . ("French Feminism" 146)

As one of these "specific ideological sets," theoretical Orientalism invariably involves a theory of the origin of the sign. In significant contrast to the long-standing European tradition which viewed Egyptian and Chinese writings as related, sacred languages, Kristeva identifies Chinese characters as explicitly *not* hieroglyphic:

. . . si l'écriture a trait à la magie, elle est loin de s'arroger une sainteté, d'obtenir une valeur sacrée, au contraire, l'écriture est le *synonyme du pouvoir politique et gouvernemental* et se confond avec la fonction politique. (*Le langage* 84)

Chinese writing, unlike ideological Western discourse, explicitly displays its secular origin and function. Moreover, Kristeva understands ideographs as interstitial traces ("*le tracé*," *Le langage* 79), aligning Chinese writing with her general valorization of the syntactical and "horizontal" against the semantic and "vertical"—the former said to be conducive to materialism and desire, the latter to metaphysics and theology.

Thus while Kristeva's treatment of the Chinese language may ultimately be as mystifying as those of, say, early translations of Egyptian hieroglyphics, its Marxist and Freudian claims should

prevent us from immediately dismissing it as an "orientalist fantasy about the other." The privileged status of the hieroglyphic in Freud's theory of dreams and in Marx's theory of the commodity should be enough to remind us, again, that we cannot simply oppose Orientalism and theory, particularly if our objection to the latter is based on its being imperialist fantasy. While several critics have treated "Orientalism" in Tel Quel theory, to my knowledge none has yet considered Orientalism as theory. Given the central importance of "writing" in modern theory, we might begin by taking a look at the role of Oriental languages in the most influential theory of writing to have emerged from the proximity of the Tel Quel group, Derrida's *De la grammatologie*.

## *II. Ideographs and ideology in logocentrism*

According to Derrida, the Western philosophical tradition's treatment of language is fundamentally "logocentric." The logos, according to one definition, is the conjunction of *ratio* and *oratio*, reason and speech.<sup>3</sup> This conjunction, Derrida argues, almost invariably leads to a hierarchical relationship between thought, speech, and writing. According to this schema, thought, in its outward movement, becomes increasingly constrained by the growing materiality of that in which it finds form. Common sense and Western metaphysics tell us that written words are material, culturally specific things which precede any given instance of their use. Spoken words are a little different, born out of the specificity of the "living" situation in which they are produced; speech is more production than repetition, and we generally distinguish between reading aloud and speaking. Thought would then be a kind of pure production, virtually devoid of any element of repetition, materiality or, therefore, cultural specificity.

Derrida argues that "la secondarité qu'on croyait pouvoir réserver à l'écriture affecte tout signifié en général" (*Grammatologie* 16). No primal experience of sensory data ever takes place prior to being made intelligible. And intelligibility involves the imposition of identity, ideality, in short, an element of repetition. Even the most "primary" experience comes to us as a kind of writing ("arché-écriture"). Derrida's point is therefore not to prioritize empirical writing over speech, but rather to suspend the way of thinking that always valorizes what comes "first." Both writing and speech are

secondary, but in such way that their belatedness is not merely an alibi for the primacy of something else.

Because it is so easy to argue that the materiality of its signifiers is secondary to its “signifieds,” alphabetic writing supports logocentrism. “Logocentrism” (or “phonologocentrism”) therefore requires the effacement of writing in the logos.<sup>4</sup> Strategies for this effacement of course vary among different “Western” philosophers, yet each is ultimately compelled to reduce writing to a moment in the development of speech:

Cette téléologie conduit à interpréter comme crise passagère et accident de parcours toute irruption du non-phonétique dans l’écriture, et l’on serait en droit de la considérer comme un ethnocentrisme occidental, un primitivisme pré-mathématique et un intuitionnisme préformaliste. (*Grammatologie* 59)

This alphabetic teleology appears not only in such explicitly teleological theories as Hegel’s, but acts as a normative guideline in many modern writings on the “development” of languages. Erik Iversen, for example, in a book explicitly devoted to tracing Western misunderstandings of Ancient Egyptian, writes:

... the Egyptians had actually created the theoretical background for the abolition of all other graphic elements, phonetical as well as ideographical ... Strangely enough they never took this natural consequence of their own discoveries, but retained all the complexities of the original system throughout their history. (19)

If metaphysics confirms the primacy of thought by denigrating the materiality of the signifier, an undoing of this hierarchy by ideographic script is perhaps possible. Following the logic of Derrida’s own arguments, it should be impossible for ideograms to represent the nature of language more truly than alphabetically-represented words; at best they could allegorize the extent to which language is always “writing.” Nevertheless, Derrida describes ideographs as having made possible “un puissant mouvement de civilisation se développant hors de tout logocentrisme” (*Grammatologie* 138). This theoretically suspect “hors de tout logocentrisme” is also, as Zhang Longxi has demonstrated in *The*

*Tao and the Logos*, historically inaccurate: “logocentric” discourse is by no means alien to the Chinese philosophical tradition. In a more general vein, Spivak, in her “Translator’s Preface” to *Grammatology*, writes:

The relationship between logocentrism and ethnocentrism is indirectly invoked in the very first sentence of the ‘Exergue.’ Yet, paradoxically, and almost by a reverse ethnocentrism, Derrida insists that logocentrism is a property of the *West* . . . the *East* is never seriously studied or deconstructed in the Derridean text. Why then must it remain, recalling Hegel and Nietzsche in their most cartological humors, as the name of the limits of the text’s knowledge? (lxxxii)

There is a subtle but great theoretical danger in complacently criticizing or even naming “the West” and thereby reinforcing, negatively, the power of Eurocentrism. An ostensibly critical relationship to the other often serves merely to support one’s own identity.

We have seen that what is at stake in the Tel Quel vision of Oriental languages is the possibility of a non- or anti-ideological semiotics. The East Asian ideograph has, in the group’s articulation of a critical theory of the sign, the status of a unique example. As such, it ceases to be an *example* and functions, rather, as a pseudo-empirical phantasm, negotiating between theoretical possibility and historical example. This brings us to the utopian Orients of Roland Barthes.

### *III. Reading the Empire of Signs*

... la Chine ne donne à lire que son Texte politique. Ce Texte est partout: aucun domaine ne lui est soustrait; dans tous les discours que nous avons entendus, la Nature (le naturel, l’éternel) ne parle plus . . .

—*Alors la Chine?*

... I read Japan as a text . . . while our theater is based, above all, on expressiveness—everything Japanese seems to me to be the fortuitous markings of a text. In Japan, I am constantly reading signs. . . . They are not written in books but traced on the silk of life . . .

—*The Grain of the Voice*

In his best-selling *L'empire des signes* (1970), Roland Barthes insists that he writes "sans prétendre en rien représenter ou analyser la moindre réalité (ce sont les gestes majeurs du discours occidental)" (9). Rather Japan is "simplement" to provide him with "une réserve de traits" with which to explore "l'idée d'un système symbolique inoui," even "la fissure même du symbolique" (10, 11). Barthes maintains that his book is not about Japan, but is essentially an *allegory* (the term is not his) of a culture free from the metaphysics of meaning, a culture consciously aware of the inscriptional nature of language, indeed of "experience."

Yet there are a number of problems with Barthes's claiming *not* to represent the Orient. First, it is ultimately untenable for Barthes to describe his selections of Japanese images as "simplement une réserve de traits." The specificity of his tropes necessarily haunts the text and is, indeed, the basis of its intelligibility. It is not merely that Barthes cannot escape from a net of intertextuality; rather, he faces a problem which inevitably structures all discourses which identify themselves as Western. It is not possible for a Westerner to write as a Westerner without the Orient. Barthes is, in effect, writing: "I am not being Western and Orientalist; I make no claims to know about the Orient, that which is not the West, and am, therefore, not like other Westerners, Westerners being those who are not like Orientals." Writing Orientalist texts without reference to the "real" Orient (except as a "reserve of features") is precisely what Orientalism is, by Said's definition, all about.

*L'empire des signes* is part of Barthes's career-long concern with ideology critique. Recalling Spivak's "cartological humors," Barthes writes "il est dérisoire de vouloir contester notre société sans jamais penser les limites mêmes de la langue par laquelle (rapport instrumental) nous prétendons la contester" (16-17, my emphasis). Barthes is working with a concept of ideology very similar to that described by de Man as "aesthetic ideology." In the simplest possible terms: one thinks one is seeing, experiencing, when in fact one is reading. Language allows culture to pass itself off as Nature, and is ideological to the extent that it effaces itself as a set of conventions with a material history, and begins to appear as a more-or-less transparent "medium" between reality and a consciousness. An ideological use of language is one in which language's performative qualities are effaced, whose material means of production appear as secondary to the meanings which they

themselves have created, and continue to create. "In the West, in our culture, our languages, we must wage a deadly serious and historic battle with the signified . . . within a nihilistic perspective in an almost Nietzschean sense of the term . . ." (Barthes, *Grain* 85-86). Again "the Orient" functions to delimit "the West" as Barthes's quest for an alternative semiotics takes him to an explicitly utopian Orient: "... la Chine est *paisible*. La paix . . . n'est-elle pas cette région, pour nous utopique, où la guerre des sens est abolie?" (*Alors 10*). The East, in short, "c'est la fin de l'herméneutique" (*Alors 8*).

In the Orient alienated production is replaced by inscriptive work, *because of its language*: "la structure même du japonais ramène ou retient ces êtres dans leurs qualité de *produits*, de signes coupés de l'alibi référentiel par excellence: celui de la chose vivante" (*L'empire* 16).<sup>5</sup> Japanese writing (hand-writing only, presumably) is therefore an allegory or perhaps an example—this, we will see, is a crucial question—of a utopian form of labor. Not only is the Japanese sign not to be read as referring to a living thing, it is not to be read at all: "non point le *lire* (*lire son symbolisme*) mais refaire le trajet de la main qui l'a écrit: écriture véritable, puisqu'elle . . . permet de refaire le tracé de son travail" (*L'empire* 60). According to the definitions outlined above, Japanese is a non-ideological language.

When "dehumanizing" the voice in this passage on the Bunraku puppet theater, Barthes seems to be trying to paraphrase Derrida's critique of the primacy of the voice:

La voix: enjeu réel de la modernité, substance particulière de langage, que l'on essaye partout de faire triompher. Tout au contraire, le *Bunraku* a une idée *limitée* de la voix . . . ce que la voix extériorise, en fin de compte, ce n'est pas ce qu'elle porte (les « sentiments »), c'est elle-même, sa propre prostitution . . . (*L'empire* 69-71)

In the Bunraku theater "*la substance vocale reste écrite* [my emphasis] . . . [le *Bunraku*] montre le geste, il laisse voir l'acte, il expose à la fois l'art et le travail, réserve à chacun d'eux son écriture" (*L'empire* 71-4). "Tout cela," Barthes notes "rejoint, bien sûr, l'effet de distance recommandé par Brecht" (*L'empire* 74). The ideological implications are, not surprisingly, similar as well:

... si le manipulateur n'est pas caché, pourquoi, comment voulez-vous en faire un Dieu? ... la marionnette ne singeant plus la créature, l'homme n'est plus une marionnette entre les mains de la divinité, le *dedans* ne commande plus le *dehors*.  
(*L'empire* 84)

Like a Kristevaian ideograph, the Bunraku puppet-master represents:

un cachet civil (non théâtral), son visage est offert à la lecture des spectateurs; mais ce qui est si soigneusement, si précieusement donné à lire, c'est qu'il n'y a rien à lire; on retrouve ici cette exemption du sens qui illumine véritablement tant d'œuvres de l'Orient. (Barthes, "Leçon" 30)

Yet how can Barthes claim to present us with *examples*, even *illustrations* of inscription? The problem is the same as that identified by Spivak in the case of Kristeva. By definition inscription is prior not only to reading but also to "experience"—it is the very condition of their possibility. To the extent that his own text fails to be allegorical ("I'm using some 'Japanese' tropes to allegorize an alternative symbolic practice"), but is rather symbolic ("My text represents a (perhaps fictional) reality in which there exists an alternate semiotic system"), Barthes has misunderstood Derridean inscription as a phenomenology of the production of meaning.

Furthermore, if all language is structured as the inscription of traces, then alphabetic writing cannot change this as a "fact," but merely impose a sort of false consciousness. How must this tension between linguistic and phenomenological models be read: "The Japanese way is better, because it is explicitly and self-consciously graphic," or "The West should look to Japan, because in Japanese culture productions Westerners can read, as other, the essence of their own?" Although Barthes has instructed his audience to read his text allegorically, the force of his own style causes him to slip into symbolic diction. When, for example, he writes of newspaper photographs as citations—"cette écriture n'écrit rien (ou écrit: rien)" (*L'empire* 122)—, this small stylistic turn substantializes *rien*. The example is extreme: if the word "nothing" is referential, then a phenomenological model of language has scored an absolute, if somehow always temporary, victory over linguistic models of

language. Barthes's text is not really about writing, but about consciousness.

Not only does Barthes see Japanese writing (which is understandable enough), Japan becomes, in his text, the place where language shows itself. While he seeks to dismiss the temporal and causal models which support a historicist concept of Orient as origin, I would argue that the danger here is less that of an ontological Origin, and more Barthes's tendency to make appear things which can't—or aren't supposed to be able to—appear. Barthes's Orient ultimately emerges as a sort of quasi-origin which visibly signifies its own trace-structure: his Orient is where we can witness inscription, the moment, even (against Derrida) the *site* where the hallucination of origin is effected. This Orient is what the Orient has always been: where or when one can see the origin—the theater of theory.

If it is true that Barthes *reads* Japan this is possible only because he *sees* Japanese. This is all well and good except that Barthes interprets the alienation necessary to this reversal as something built into Japanese culture. He understands his experiences as a foreign reader to be those of a native Japanese *consciousness*. In Barthes's view, "Japan" is, even for the Japanese, a kind of living Brechtian theater in which culture never pretends to be nature. This reminds us that Barthes's Oriental theater is not only Oriental, but also theater; the "example" of Bunraku theater is by no means fortuitous. Barthes's interest in the art form goes back at least to 1968, when "*Leçon d'écriture*" was published in the summer issue of *Tel Quel*, the same issue which published "*La Révolution ici maintenant*." Nearly all of Barthes's early writings pertain to the theater and its central role in culture.

It is therefore initially surprising to find Barthes claiming that in "all the great periods of theater, costume had a powerful semantic value; it was not there only to be seen, it was also there to be *read*, it communicated ideas, information, or sentiments" ("Diseases" 46). While early essays such as "The Diseases of Costume" praise the readable costume, Barthes's later treatment of the Bunraku praises precisely the visual qualities of the readable. In the early work Barthes suggests a kind of happy medium:

the good costume must be material enough to signify and transparent enough not to turn its signs into parasites . . . it

must pass unnoticed in itself yet it must also exist . . . it must be both material and transparent: we must see it but not look at it. ("Diseases" 49-50)

We see here the early Barthes's hesitancy to valorize openly the opacity of the signifier; a rhetoric of health guides his argument, rather than one of *jouissance*.

What Barthes likes about the theater of the Orient is precisely that it has eliminated theatricality: "Ce qui est expulsé de la scène, c'est l'hystérie, c'est-à-dire le théâtre lui-même; et ce qui est mis à la place, c'est l'action nécessaire à la production du spectacle: le travail se substitue à l'intérieurité" ("Leçon" 30). Barthes later uses the same language which he had used to describe the Bunraku puppet theater to describe the untheatrical theater of Chinese life: "sans théâtre, sans bruit, sans pose, bref sans hystérie" (*Alors* 12). Both ideology and the Orient are, for Barthes, problems of presentation.

#### *IV. Theory and Its Double: Artaud's Vision of an Oriental Theater*

[Comme l'alchimie,] le théâtre aussi doit être considéré comme le Double non pas de cette réalité quotidienne et directe dont il s'est peu à peu réduit à n'être que l'inerte copie, aussi vaine qu'édulcorée, mais d'une autre réalité dangereuse et typique, où les Principes, comme les dauphins, quand ils ont montré leur tête s'empressent de rentrer dans l'obscurité des eaux.

—Antonin Artaud

In a passage like this it seems that Artaud is advocating something like a Platonic theater in which "les Principes" would manifest themselves directly to mortal eyes. Yet it is characteristic of Artaud's thought that *what* appears is less essential than *how* it appears:

Dans ce théâtre toute création vient de la scène, trouve sa traduction et ses origines même dans une impulsion psychique secrète qui est la Parole d'avant les mots. . . . C'est une sorte de Physique première, d'où l'Esprit ne s'est jamais détaché. (91-92, my emphasis)

Thus what appear in Artaud's ideal theater are not Ideas, for they cannot be said to have an existence outside of or prior to their appearance. What we would have, then, would be a quasi-material theatrical:

langage par signes, par gestes et attitudes ayant une valeur idéographique . . . [dont les gestes] représentent des idées, des attitudes de l'esprit, des aspects de la nature, et cela d'une manière effective, concrète . . . comme ce langage oriental qui représente la nuit par un arbre sur lequel un oiseau qui a déjà fermé un œil commence à fermer l'autre . . . On voit que ces signes constituent de véritables hiéroglyphes, où l'homme, dans la mesure où il contribue à les former, n'est qu'une forme comme une autre . . . (59)

We find here the now-familiar theme of the disruption of humanistic and referential language by the force of an ideograph which presents its own taking-place. Artaud's is a theater of opaque signs which do not claim to refer to the phenomenal world, but rather present the violence of their own inscription. Such an Oriental theater would therefore be a solution to what Artaud understands to be a crisis of modern consciousness: a cleft between signs and the things to which they refer. Because the thing to which the pure theatrical sign refers can only be said to exist in that sign, there is no possibility of dissociation.

Artaud is particularly fond of the Balinese theater, whose "acteurs avec leurs robes géométriques semblent des hiéroglyphes animés" (82-83).<sup>6</sup> Artaud is not intending to be metaphorical when he compares the actors to hieroglyphics, for "on peut dire que l'esprit des plus antiques hiéroglyphes présidera à la création de ce langage théâtral pur" (193). In fact, he attributes to Oriental languages the same powers he attributes to the pure theatrical sign:

Il y a d'autres langages au monde que notre langage occidental qui a opté pour le dépouillement, pour le dessèchement des idées et où les idées nous sont présentées à l'état inerte sans ébranler au passage tout un système d'analogies naturelles comme dans les langages orientaux. (168)

Not only would Artaudian theater be *like* an Oriental language, the two are all but identical; Artaud's theater is a language, Oriental languages are theater.

The dream of such a language is by no means unique to the 20th century avant-garde, as Derrida's citation of Aristotle reminds us:

De même que l'écriture n'est pas le même pour tous les hommes, les mots parlés ne sont pas non plus les mêmes, alors que les états d'âme dont ces expressions sont immédiatement les signes (*semeia protos*) sont identiques chez tous, comme sont identiques aussi les choses dont ces états sont les images. (*Grammatologie* 22)

Ideograph, like Aristotle's *semeia protos*, are somehow both intelligible *and* an unmediated image of the thing to which they refer. Terms such as ideo-graph, ideo-gram, and hiero-glyph (none of which is taken from the language which they are used to describe) indicate in their very form their fantasy-function: to bind, in a sign which takes properties of both realms, the material to the linguistic world.<sup>7</sup>

Barthes's theater allows us to see that, in general terms, both Brecht's and Artaud's theaters are about making appear the basis of appearance. Their theater is the theater of theater, their theory a theory of theory.<sup>8</sup> The crucial difference between Brecht and Artaud is their understanding of the nature of this ordinarily concealed condition of appearance. For Brecht (at least as he is generally read), ordinary theater is made possible by an ideological distortion which conceals the means and modes of production, allowing only product to appear—and that not as product, but as something like Nature. This state of affairs is historically specific and might ultimately be overcome. Artaud's critique of traditional theatrical representation is much more broad-based—it is not bourgeois capitalism which conceals the means of representation, but the entire metaphysical framework of Western culture. For Artaud, the birth of a new theater would signal less the coming of a new period in history than the end of history as Westerners understand it. Both theaters are intended to disrupt our normal process of theatrical reading and force us to see (its workings). Yet neither is a valorization of seeing over reading (after all this is what traditional representation does—pass off our readings of it as “seeing”)—rather one

sees that one is reading. What was read as seeing phenomena is seen as reading a text.

This rather abstract way of comparing two very different dramatic theorists is meant only to indicate the way in which they come together in Barthes's conception of a revolutionary theater. Barthes combines Brechtian and Artaudian theory, creating a tension between an understanding of ideology as an historically specific problem, and an understanding of "ideology" as inherent to Western rationality, or even to language as such. This tension has proven productive for more than one Marxian critic, yet remains haunted by the possibility that language and ideology are all but indistinguishable. Such a conclusion would not mean the end of ideology critique, but does, or should, problematize any attempts to point to *examples* of non-ideological languages.

#### *V. Phenomenality and Critique*

... it is curious to observe the extent to which the changing aspect on Egyptological and hieroglyphical problems in the various epochs and periods, reflects and illustrates their changing attitude towards artistic, literary and scientific problems in general.

—Erik Iversen

Our summary of Barthes's tourist activities in Japan summarizes the two-fold project of post-structuralism as the whole: to read the world and to see language. This chiasmus is, however, a troubled one: the world can be read *like* a language, language being material *like* the world, etc.<sup>9</sup> If it is true that "chiasmic reversals secure, by the very movement of the inversion of the link that exists between opposite poles (i.e., through a back-stretched connection), the agreement of a thing at variance with itself," it is equally true that "all the chiasm achieves . . . is a substitution of a substitution, by which it prolongs the rhetorical delusion of the text as such" (Gasché xvii-xviii).

The problem of "the Orient" is a kind of working out of the problem of appearance-haunted-by-language, the problem of needing to orient oneself in two worlds at once: the linguistic and the phenomenal.<sup>10</sup> If the relationship between these suns, and the worlds which they let appear, is chiasmic, then neither is a meta-

phor for the other, neither is the origin of the other, neither can be saved from the other. Moreover,

tout ce qui, dans le discours sur la métaphore, passe par le signe *cidos*, avec tout son système, s'articule sur l'analogie entre le regard de *nous* et le regard sensible, entre le soleil intelligible et le soleil visible. . . . La philosophie, comme théorie de la métaphore, aura d'abord été une métaphore de la théorie. (Derrida, "Mythologie" 303)

We find in the critique of Orientalism the problem that exists today in much political critical theory. What is it that Western theorists are trying to save from Orientalism—the Orient? Wouldn't this be akin to saving Uqbar from Borges? How does one rescue a textual effect from the text that effects it? There is something supremely Western about trying to be *not* Orientalist, something fantastically hubristic about the implied possibility of universal subjectivity, an implication which always threatens to turn sour the good will to struggle against racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, logocentrism. While the obvious blind spots and prejudices of Orientalist discourse need to be criticized, it should also be remembered that much of this material was precisely *critical* theory in the sense that it often represented the West's best effort to see beyond itself, to understand its own specificity by coming to know the specificity of an other. To put things a bit baldly: Orientalism is always already critique of Orientalism, and vice versa. In the case of Barthes's *L'empire des signes*, it was ultimately his very disavowal of any claim to represent the Orient as a real place which allows us to read in his pseudo-allegory an allegory of the very essence of the Orient: a figure of Western discourse, one which presents itself as an experience of the Other. And it is not merely one figure among others, but the outside which constitutes our discourse precisely to the extent that it is "ours."

My larger point in this discussion has been to show that Orientalism and critical theory are by no means mutually exclusive—in fact, I would argue that they are in certain important ways the same operation. It is often precisely in delimiting ourselves that we find ourselves; in light of the booming cultural studies business in this country (and whatever else it may be, it is also business), this seems important to remember. If, as Said argues, the Orient has been an essential trope in the self-definition of modern Western

culture, it is, I think, no less true that the very effort to critique this trope, the effort to erase the rhetoric about other cultures and get at the phenomenal truth beneath it, has been equally essential. The history of the linguisticization of reality (which Said sees as the essential operation of Orientalism) is chiasmically related to another history—the dream of a phenomenal language. The (to unreading Western eyes) overtly graphic qualities of its languages made the Orient a perpetual candidate site for the pursuit of this dream.<sup>11</sup> It is revealing that Anatole France's *Polyphilos* creates "un fragment d'hymne védique" reminiscent of "la vieille mythologie orientale" by defiguralizing a philosophical sentence, by reviving, putting "life" back into and reliteralizing its previously effaced metaphors. While it is not untrue that "orientalization" might be described as the imposition of Western figure onto Eastern reality, it might be more useful to think of this process as the recovery (in a double sense) of the "reality" beneath Western figure, the "discovery" in the East of a defiguralized reality. Dreams of a language of (sensory or idealist) immediacy have as their necessary corollary the imposition, often violent, of figures onto the world.

Fiction and theory, in short, seem to have a way not of negating each other, but rather of perpetuating each other—or, better, of perpetuating each other by negating each other. Whichever is valorized, each provides an alibi for the other. Truth, it seems, is no stranger to fiction, at least in *theory*. Granted that there is a legitimate urgency to cries for a "return" to culture and politics, it nevertheless seems that the study of relations between East and West, and between discourses and things, may also benefit from the quieter pathos of rhetorical analysis:

At the core of the chiasm one sees either an absence of contact between infinitely distant terms or terms contaminated by each other to such an extent that all attempt to distinguish between them corresponds to an arbitrary decision or act of violence. (Gasché xxvi)

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### Notes

1. See Loeb for bibliographical information.

2. As Lowe also discusses, the French intellectual left's turn toward China no doubt also reflected their disappointment with the Soviet-supported and -supporting PCF.

3. The ratio / oratio formulation is from Zhang Longxi's *The Tao and the Logos*.

4. When opposing a "grammatology" to a "phonology," it must be remembered that what is bad about phonocentrism, if I may put it so bluntly, is not its valorization of the voice *per se* (which is no more or less primary than empirical writing), but rather the fact that "the voice" is merely an alibi for "the mind." Phono-logy is psycho-logy, ideo-logy. A "grammatology" would, therefore, be not an anti-phonetic but an anti-ideological practice. This does not explain away Derrida's text as "Marxist" but does clarify somewhat the otherwise confusingly revolutionary tone of the opening chapter.

5. Kristeva similarly suggests that "les idéogrammes chinois sont non seulement des désignations d'objets, mais des désignations de désignations, c'est-à-dire des dessins de gestes" (*Chinoises* 85). Put in Saussurian terms, Chinese signifiers don't claim to point to referents, instead they know that they point to signifieds. The Chinese are close to nature—not the phenomenal world, but rather that essentially gestural language which is natural to man.

6. His praise of the actors "mechanical" qualities ("Ces roulements mécaniques d'yeux, ces moues des lèvres, ce dosage des crispations musculaires, aux effets méthodiquement calculés et qui enlèvent tout recours à l'improvisation spontanée . . .") would later be echoed by Barthes in his description of the Bunraku (Artaud 84; Barthes, *L'empire* 74-75).

7. Artaud uses "hieroglyphic" and "ideograph" interchangeably, seldom making distinctions between various "Oriental" languages.

8. From the Greek verb *theorein*, to look at, to contemplate, to survey.

9. This is one possible, if necessarily temporary, solution to a fundamental problem: meaning has as a prerequisite the irreducible possibility of the non-coincidence of language and phenomemon. If signs are wholly equal to the things to which they refer, meaning cannot take place. If, on the other hand, the order of words is utterly alien to the world of things, then meaning has nothing to do with that world. See Derrida's "La mythologie blanche."

10. I hope that I have been able to make it apparent that the pun connecting orientation and orientalization is not fortuitous. What links them is a certain conception of truth which seeks to weave together meaning and phenomenal events—as sense, *sens*, *Sinn*.

11. In fact, if “the Orient” is to be understood as the place of visible writings, this provides some explanation for the geo-cultural heterogeneity of the many places described as Oriental.

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# Cil qui l'escrist: Narrative Authority and Intervention in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*

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Marcella Munson

Is poetic discourse always the passive discourse within a cultural framework?

—Eugene Vance

The twelfth century brought with it revolution in a number of areas. Chief among these were the realm of subjectivity and the creation of the individual. Among the texts which deal with the issue of nascent subjectivity is the *Yvain*, where narrative subjectivity finds new expression. I propose that it is through certain narratorial insertions and disruptions, including the traditional narrative loci of prologue and epilogue, that the question of subjectivity is raised and examined by Chrétien. Although the entire text can be said to be the "intervention" of the narrator (insofar as it is entirely his creation), specific types of narrative "intervention" can be analyzed to examine the question of how nascent subjectivity is represented in this twelfth century work. The conscious use of certain structural framing devices bears the narrator's opinion and highlights ambiguities which Chrétien then attempts to preserve at the end of his work.

## I. Narrative Intervention and the Pleasure of Narration

The *Yvain* is a text which celebrates the creation and telling of narrative. From the opening pages where Calogrenant relates the story of his previous *avanture*, to the furtive joining of the group by Guenièvre in order to hear a story being told, to Guenièvre's retelling of Calogrenant's story for the benefit of King Arthur—discourteous enough to leave his own feast—to *Yvain*'s summarizing of his own subsequent trip to Esclados's fountain upon the arrival of King Arthur, characters are constantly (re)telling stories. Given the importance of the act of narration as constructed by the text itself, one can interpolate its importance to the community in which the *Yvain* was composed. In this sense, the *Yvain* is :

performative text which both constructs and communicates fundamental societal values through narrative and metaphor rather than through discursive language.

As one would thus suspect, storytelling is not merely fun and games in the *Yvain*. The very act of relating a story becomes vital for the development and justification of the plot: if Calogrenant had continued to guard his experience in silence, as he had done for nine years, not only would *Yvain* not have had *justification* to set out upon his journey, he also would not have known about the existence of the fountain in the first place. Similarly, nine years previously, Calogrenant himself would not originally have known where—or *what*—to seek, had not the *vilain* put him on the right track by relating an oral narrative. Narrative thus acts as a means of plot furthering; it becomes a concrete and deliberately chosen action which in turn points—and often *pushes*—other characters in a certain direction.<sup>1</sup>

There is yet another aspect of the telling of narrative that warrants inspection. Integral to the issue of narration, which is so important for the plot functioning of the *Yvain*, is the presence of a narrator. Both the physical and textual presence of a narrator are important for a text such as this, which would have depended on a combination of written and oral signs for its (re)production; in all likelihood, the story would have been written in manuscript form and read aloud from the page by a storyteller to a group of people. Thus, the probable means of transmission of the text indicates an inscription in two cultures: an oral and a “written” one. The dual existence of the text itself in a manuscript culture (a cross between the oral and written worlds) suggests that the fluctuating presence/absence of the narrator is “always already” in question. This double inscription has important consequences for the narrative structure.

Many critics, including Eugene Vance, have pointed out the importance of memory and narratorial presence in twelfth century texts of this sort (29). But few critics have concentrated on the repetitive occurrence of certain types of narratorial interruption in the text. Narratorial interruptions are perhaps commonplace in texts constructed in the dual culture of the twelfth century, but there are several interruptions which occur at various structural midpoints in the text which I would like to examine in detail. These interventions highlight both the “textual” status of the narrator and

the issue of remembering and forgetting, a cyclical structure upon which the plot itself of the *Yvain* depends.

The first interruption occurs in the midst of the contract negotiating and leavetaking between Laudine and Yvain. The narrator is describing in great detail the pain that Yvain feels upon leaving, when the frame of the narrative shifts and the enunciating *je* of the narrator steps in:

Ja, ce cuit, l'ore ne savra  
 qu'esperance traï l'avra;  
 car s'il un tot seul jor trespassse  
 del terme qu'il ont mis a masse,  
 molt a enviz trovera mes  
 en sa dame trives ne pes.  
 Et je cuit qu'il le passera,  
 que departir ne le leira  
 mes sire Gauvains d'avoec lui. (2663-2671)

The narrator informs us that he is worried for Yvain, and fears that he will not return within the time allotted. Clearly, this intervention serves several purposes. It mirrors the potential fear of the audience (will Yvain keep his word to Laudine?); it foreshadows the actual twists and turns which the plot will take; and finally, it serves as a handy point of temporary closure after an evening's worth of storytelling, a way to ensure that the audience will come back to hear the rest of the story. The interruption serves all of these functions which have been amply addressed by many critics, yet it also performs a distinctly narrative one: by inserting himself directly into the frame of the story by means of the *je*, the narrator brings up the issue of narration once again and, in doing so, highlights the issue of narrative uncertainty and ambiguity with reference to the future. By highlighting the question of uncertainty, the narrator's status is bounded by a limit. Here, the narrator is not acting as an omniscient narrator but as an intradiegetic one, one which appears within the confines of the characters' world. According to what the narrator tells us, he does not know for certain what will happen, although he has a fair idea. But it must also be mentioned that the narrator is *consciously* subjugating his manifestation of knowledge to a temporal limit set by the story, that is, by the narration itself, which gradually evolves since words cannot be spoken simultaneously, but one at a time.

A second narrative interruption further points up the shifting status of the narrator between the extra- and intradiegetic worlds encompassed by the text. This interruption situates itself in the episode of the battle between Gauvain and Yvain. Yvain has just arrived at the castle where the older sister awaits, and the narrator takes this time to tell us what he knows of Gauvain's current situation:

Jorz avoit passez ne sai quanz  
que mes sire Gauvains s'estoit  
herbregiez, si qu'an ne savoit  
de lui a cort nule novele,  
fors que seulemant la pucele  
por cui il se voloit combatre. (5866-5871)

What is most remarkable about this narratorial insertion is not merely the narrator's insistence that he has no idea how long Gauvain has been gone from the scene, although this in itself is ironic: Gauvain has presumably been absent in the story because he is off in another diegesis also authored by Chrétien, namely, the *Chevalier de la charrette*. What is most unusual is that there is another character in this scene who *does* know the whereabouts of Gauvain, the eldest daughter, and she is the one character in this scene who is extremely negatively marked.

An analysis of how this character is negatively marked further underscores the presence of the narrator. The narrator takes care to use a seemingly simple, locative description to pass judgment on the moral rectitude of the eldest daughter. She is described as "la dameisele qui tort a" (5878), and the quarrel is similarly "la querele ou ele n'a droit" (5882). Since Gauvain has (apparently) only made his whereabouts known to the eldest daughter and to no one else, and since she is starkly portrayed as having no valid claim, Gauvain is also clearly in the wrong.<sup>2</sup> However, it is the ironic status claimed by the narrator which passes the negative judgment of Gauvain on to the reader; it is not stated explicitly as such. This stands as a prime example of how societal values and individual judgment are passed along by the narrative structure itself, rather than through purely discursive language.

I would now like to examine the question of narrative interruption in the "prologue" of the *Yvain* while foregrounding the

issue of narrative presence in the arena of a memory conceived of in oral, textual, and individual terms.

## *II. Liminary Elements I: The Question of the Prologue*

The question of the prologue in the *Yvain* has been hotly debated by a great number of critics. Although there is much discussion about the very existence of the prologue—for example, can one call Calogrenant's tale the intended prologue, or was the prologue to the *Lancelot* to serve as the Prologue for one great "super romance"?—one thing is certain: a traditional prologue to a medieval romance is missing, and as a result liminary elements are thrown into question from the beginning. Underlying the entire critical discussion around the prologue of the *Yvain* is in fact the issue of origins and boundaries (Ollier 32)—appropriately, perhaps—for such issues are what prologues themselves generally address.

Ollier's seminal article "The Author in the Text," dealing with the question of the prologue in Chrétien de Troyes's work, summarizes much of the previous debate over the issue of the prologue:

... the very existence of a prologue in *Yvain* has been debated: W. Foerster does not hesitate to deny its existence, on the grounds that the first lines of the romance introduce us at once into the story. We postulate, for our part, that *Yvain* does contain a prologue. *Where should its boundary be placed?* ... One could justifiably incorporate the whole of Calogrenant's narrative in the prologue.... (34, my emphasis)

While one could certainly support the argument that Calogrenant's tale serves as a type of prologue, it is especially important, given that a traditional prologue is nonextant here, to recognize what issues are thereby being thrown into question for the narratee expecting this form of textual introduction.

The prologue exists to serve very specific functions. Besides framing the narrative and introducing the text, the prologue primarily serves as the locus in which the author announces and accepts his role as enunciator of the text.<sup>3</sup> This function can readily be seen

in other prologues to Chrétien's works, including the prologue to the *Lancelot* where he states:

Puis que ma dame de Champaigne  
 vialt que romans a feire anpraigne,  
 je l'anprendrai molt volentiers . . .  
 Del Chevalier de la Charrete  
 comance Crestiens son livre. (1-25)

Here, Chrétien is clearly stating his role as enunciator of his story, which he goes on to title and to dedicate specifically to Marie de Champagne. Thus not only is his name present in this prologue, but so is the actual title of his work and the proper name of his courtly benefactor. Chrétien presents us with all of the specifics that help the enunciator to situate and begin to define the text itself.

In addition to the assumption of the narrator's persona by a speaking, enunciating *je*, one also finds in a traditional prologue an origin and *raison d'être* for the text itself. In the prologue to the *Lancelot*, the source material has been ostensibly suggested to Chrétien by the Countess of Champagne: "matiere et san li done et livre / la contesse . . ." (26-27). Chrétien thus has a preconstructed reason for embarking upon this narrative venture. By asserting that it is Marie's desire to hear this story, he obviates the need to justify his venture. The narrative enunciation in the text's prologue is in itself the justification for the text's existence in the world of the court.

In the *Yvain*, however, no such pretext for storytelling is offered to the narratee. How, then, does the *Yvain* present or justify itself to the reader? The text starts off with an invocation of the Court of King Arthur during the Feast of Pentecost, and thus with the issue of collective memory as opposed to individual memory:

Artus, li boens rois de Bretaigne  
 la cui proesce nos enseigne  
 que nos soiens preu et cortois,  
 tint cort si riche come rois  
 a cele feste qui tant coste,  
 qu'an doit clames la Pantecoste. (1-6)

The text which begins in the narrative past sets up a (presumed) distinction between the time of narration and the time of the story.

In itself, this is a normal function of the prologue; the mythic time of the past is contrasted to the here-and-now of the authorial present. Ollier has observed:

... the author's presence in the text is made progressively more strongly felt, first by means of a *nous* that establishes the author/audience community around the Arthurian model; then by reflections made on the part of the author which identify themselves as such only by the break between past and present . . . (35)

As Ollier indicates, the verb tense is one means by which to identify the authorial present from the narrative past. A concentration on verb tense brings the question of the narrator's act of narration to the fore, as does the description of what *Amors* was like *lors*, "back in the good old days." The court of King Arthur is ostensibly described and placed firmly in the narrative past.

At this point, however, a strange temporal shift occurs. The narrator moves on to a description of the current condition of *Amors* as compared to its former, exalted state. Here, the temporal marker *lors* is set up in stark contrast to the *mes or* of the present, the temporal space held by the narratee:

li deciple de son [Amors] covant,  
qui *lors* estoit molt dolz et buens;  
*mes or* a molt po des suens  
qu'a bien pres l'ont ja tuit lessiee,  
s'an est Amors molt abessiee. (16-20, my  
emphasis)

Beginning as the story does with the analysis of the current condition of Love, the narratee is forced to confront the temporal categories assigned here. But there is a strange anachronistic conflict, for as R. Howard Bloch has written, the concept of *fin'amors* was only beginning to be invented in the twelfth century. Clearly, the temporal assignment is not performing a strictly mimetic role.<sup>4</sup> Without at least recognizing the temporal play going on in the narrator's thread and attempting to situate her/himself accordingly in relation to the text, the narratee cannot successfully continue on as active interpreter of the narrative.<sup>5</sup> As Calogrenant indicates to us during his discursive speech on how the reader must listen with not

just the ears but with the heart in order for a narrative to be truthful and not mere *mansonje* or *fable*,<sup>6</sup> the narratee must take an active role.

The issue of narration is thus brought to the fore not only by the deeply imbricated, almost *mise-en-abîme* narration of Calogrenant, but also by the mention made that other, anonymous people at court are in the middle of telling stories themselves: "Li un recontoient noveles, li autre parloient d'Amors" (12-13). The pleasure and importance of the act of recounting stories is deeply embedded in the text itself, even at this purely "descriptive" narrative level.

The extreme pleasure—and complexity—of storytelling is thrown into vivid relief during Calogrenant's telling of his story. Many critics have discussed this phenomenon of narrative imbrication and have commented on line 358. Here, Calogrenant, in the middle of his tale, relates a conversation between himself and the *vilain* he encounters: "Je suis, *fet il*, uns chevaliers . . ." (358, my emphasis). As has been suggested by Dembowski, the lapse into the third person could have been either a scribal or authorial error, both of which are plausible given the complexity of narrative levels present at this point in the text and the probable means of text transmission in the twelfth century. Dembowski goes on to say that "[the error] confirms our suspicion that an extended narration or description made by a protagonist-narrator becomes indistinguishable from the voice of the author-narrator himself" (105). He further postulates that by giving the author the burden of carrying most of the monologue, the rest of the characters can be left "intact" with respect to their intradiegetic status; the characters are never forced to play an omniscient role and thus remain more plausible. I will discuss this topic more fully in relation to Lunete.

Yet another interesting, and perhaps more illuminating, narrative "slip" occurs further on in the text when Yvain is on his journey and has just encountered the wonderful host with the beautiful daughter foreshadowed by Calogrenant's tale. The narrator, in an attempt to compare Yvain's experience with the previous one of Calogrenant, finds a satisfactory, even *truthful*, description elusive:

La nuit ot, ce poez savoir,  
tel oste com il vost avoir;

car plus de bien et plus d'enor  
 trueve il assez el vavasor  
*que ne vos ai conté et dit;*  
 et an la pucele revit  
 de san et de biauté cent tanz  
*que n'ot conté Calogrenanz.* (777-784, my  
 emphasis)

What is most striking is the primary narrator's self-attribution as the narrator of Calogrenant's original story. Considering the pains taken in the text to develop Calogrenant as the narrator of his own story, it is a surprising slip to make, especially in light of the appropriate delegation of narrative "authorship" a mere three lines farther. It is more likely that the primary narrator is attempting to highlight the action of narration in the text, while also emphasizing relative levels of narratorial credibility. Here, although both narrators were perhaps "at fault" by not relating the full quality of the host's and daughter's personal attributes, the accusation of misrepresentation falls more heavily upon Calogrenant, whose representational *décalage* is actually quantified as being *cent tanz* less powerful or accurate than "reality" as seen by the primary narrator.

The issue of the reliable narrator is brought up by several critics, most notably Grimbert and Uitti. Uitti argues that while the narratee's loyalty ultimately shifts from the events as representing objective truth to the act of narration itself, from which we must maintain a critical distance, the narrator her/himself remains reliable. However, Grimbert perceives the narratee as riding down the same path as Yvain does during the story (33). Like Yvain, the narratee has no way of knowing what will happen or where the (textual) path leads; consequently the narrator remains ultimately unreliable. One could even make the analogy that the narratee, like Yvain, thinks s/he knows exactly where s/he is headed at the outset, and it is only later on in the story that profound ambiguity sets in. After all, when Yvain sets out on his original journey, he knows exactly where he is headed and what signs to seek along the way. It is only once he gets there that errancy in the narrative flow occurs.

From Grimbert's statements, one can interpolate the following point: the narratee always has to make a conscious choice about whether to follow the narrator down the textual path that he is in the midst of creating. We have seen an example of this already in the

first part of the text which talks about the current state of Love: with romantic love as a concept that was just beginning to develop, the narratee must decide how to temporally situate this extended description of the “current” state of Love which stands in opposition to how it was in the “good old days.”

However, the goal of narration in this “prologue” that is Calogrenant’s story lies somewhere between the interpretations of Grimbert and Uitti. I believe that at specific times the issue of mistrust is highlighted, and at other times it disappears almost completely.<sup>7</sup> In particular, when certain characters appear on the scene, the narratee is encouraged to maintain a critical distance from the process of narration. In the case of Lunete, the ultimate *faire-faire* construction who herself directs narrative, her presence encourages the narratee to take a larger perspective and to see the role that s/he plays in the narrative itself.

One such example of this narrative distrust appears when Lunete is explaining to Yvain why she has chosen to help him after his entrapment in Laudine’s castle. She informs Yvain that she has recognized him because:

une foiz, a la cort le roi,  
m’envoia ma dame an message;  
espoir, si ne fui pas si sage,  
si cortoise, ne de tel estre  
come pucele deüst estre,  
mes onques chevalier n’i ot  
qu’a moi deignast parler un mot  
fors vos, tot seul, qui estes ci . . . . (1004-1011)

Although Lunete herself presents the possibility that she may not have behaved in a way befitting a young woman at court, she nevertheless clearly implies that it was the fault of the knights at King Arthur’s Court that no one *deigned* to address her except for Yvain (Lacy 32). The abundance of words such as *mes*, *onques*, *un mot* and *tot seul* clearly indicate the extremity of poor behavior at court. In relating how it is that she knows Yvain’s name and what he has done, she endows King Arthur’s court with negative value. Not only is King Arthur himself by this point in the narrative negatively marked, but so is a great deal of the rest of the life at court. Lunete, while remaining an intradiegetic character in the story, comments on the other characters and cues the narratee in as

to how to interpret them. In this sense she straddles the intradiegetic border present in the text.

In a similar sense, Calogrenant gains the status of a character which almost crosses the border from the intradiegetic to the extradiegetic world. Like Lunete, he is rather a character *désabusé*, having already undergone a humiliating experience, and also having been given a hard time verbally at court. Throughout the first seven hundred or so lines of the text, he is also granted a privileged position, since he is the one who has the power to tell a hitherto unknown story. And also like Lunete, who tells Yvain, "Bien sai comant vos avez non / et reconeü vos ai bien" (1016-1017), Calogrenant is the only character whose vision supersedes that of other characters.

The text itself portrays Calogrenant's "privileged vision" in very concrete terms at the beginning of the *Yvain*. He is the only one to see Guenièvre as she furtively joins the assembled group, and thus is the only one to respond to her presence with the appropriate courtly gesture. The text states explicitly that Guenièvre has deliberately planned her entrance so that Calogrenant will be the only one to see her: "[Guenièvre] vient sor ax tot a celee, / qu'ainz que nus la poïst veoir, . . . fors que Calogrenanz sanz plus . . ." (64-67). In a very real sense Guenièvre gives Calogrenant access to a certain privileged visual perspective which the text reduplicates on a narrative level.

As we have seen, the lack of a traditional prologue in the *Yvain* brings certain issues to the fore. Not only is there no clearly defined narrator who assumes the role and responsibility for enunciation, but the issue of memory—both collective and individual—is at stake. These issues are further complicated by the presence of temporal incertitude with reference to the idea of nascent romantic love. Finally, one finds strong characters which take over enunciation and walk the border between the extra- and intradiegetic worlds of narration. All of these structures and "interruptions" force the narratee to consciously interpret the narrative. As Ollier observes,

... the other peculiarity of this prologue is that it enters immediately into the narrative. But how does it nevertheless play its role as prologue—in other words, how does it reveal this dual relationship, the relationship of the author to the text and of the text to the listener/reader? It does so pre-

cisely—and, we feel, with much greater force—by *stripping away the didactic appearance of the other prologues.* (35, my emphasis)

More precisely, it is in the lack of a prologue, in combination with a lack of set liminary elements, which produce temporal confusion, and intradiegetic characters that act as extradiegetic ones, that force the reader from the opening lines to take an active role in the creation of a “true” narrative. As I will now examine, these issues are taken up again in the structure of the epilogue, which in some ways serves as a proper prologue.

### *III. Liminary Elements II: Epilogue as Prologue?*

Where the text begins, traditional pretextual elements and the beginning of narration are joined. Similarly, where the text ends, the extradiegetic status held by the primary narrator blends with the intradiegetic world of the characters. In the first half of the text, we have seen how Lunete’s character walks the line between intra- and extradiegetic status, indicating to the reader of the text that s/he must take Lunete’s cue and become a bit *désabusé* (i.e., step outside of the narrative frame) in order to read the text correctly.

In the last few lines of the *Yvain*, the character of Lunete provides a specific model for the reader. At the end of the story, she is well pleased with herself, for she has done all that she could to bring about not only a reconciliation between Laudine and Yvain, but also a “suitable” ending to a courtly romance. In short, she is celebrating her job completed as a narrator:

Et Lunete reste molt a eise;  
ne li faut chose que li pleise,  
des qu’ele a fet la pes sanz fin  
de mon seignor Yvain le fin  
et de s’amie chiere et fine. (6799-6803)

This mood of reflection certainly frames the end of the book since these are the last lines before the enunciating voice of Chrétien finally steps in to claim the work as his. In this segment, Lunete is clearly the narrative manipulator and the creator of a story who is portrayed here as looking back on her narrative with fond remembrance. One can even imagine her recreating and reflecting upon

certain parts of the narrative. This is a model for precisely what the reader should also be in the process of doing.

The framing effect created by Lunete's introspection is further heightened by another part of the text's ending. After the scene of reconciliation between Laudine and Yvain, the text cuts short their story line quietly and without much fanfare:

Molt an est a boen chief venuz  
qu'il est amez et chier tenuz  
de sa dame, et ele de lui.  
Ne li sovient or de nelui  
que par la joie l'antroblic  
que il a de sa dolce amie. (6793-6798)

Laudine and Yvain are turned inwards upon each other, each content in the presence of the other. Yvain, once again, forgets all else—but this time the only thing he holds in his memory is Laudine. Although this second wave of *oubli* picks up on the theme of the first loss of memory (and failure to keep his promise), this forgetfulness is not nearly as consequential for the reader in terms of narrative comprehension. In one sense this is natural, since the text's plot effectively ends here; what follows are a series of statements by narrative creators and transmitters (Lunete, Chrétien, and the scribe) who are taking the credit due them.

In another sense, it seems odd to end the story of Laudine and Yvain with such lack of detail. In particular, the castle occupied by the couple still has been given no precise physical location. This lack of precise geographic name or location given to the fief is underscored by several details. The pat ending of Laudine's and Yvain's stories, coupled with the attitude presented to the reader that we shouldn't worry about their future, highlights the unimportance of the fief's location. The lack of location is also—ironically—underscored by the definitive location of the scribe's shop as stated in the prologue: while we will never know where the story came to pass, we certainly are aware of where the manuscript itself, as object of circulation and exchange, was produced.

Thus the assertion by the narrator that "molt an est a boen chief venuz" seems to be rather a letdown after all of the trouble and intrigue undertaken by the characters to reach the end point. The pat ending, sealed off most efficiently, becomes more revealing when one realizes that Lunete, our *faire-faire* construction, is the one

intradiegetic character that has been left out of this scene of closure.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the reader is being told that the characters of Laudine and Yvain are not to be followed as active models for the interpretation of the story. The reader is instead being encouraged to look back on the story and to reflect on its message and its composition, but by using Lunete—and also Chrétien, as we shall see—as a frame in which to do so.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of agency of narration is addressed in an auto-reflexive manner, right up to the very end. Chrétien is the second of the three “producers” of narrative to reinsert his voice at the end. After Lunete fades from the scene, he steps in and announces:

Del Chevalier au lyeon fine  
 Crestiens son romans ensi;  
 n'onques plus conter n'en oï  
 ne ja plus n'en orroiz conter  
 s'an n'i vialt mançonge ajoster. (6804-6808)

Suddenly we see the appearance of two traditional prologue elements, the title and the author’s name, which usually help to frame the text at the beginning. Both were totally missing in the text that Ollier and others have called the “prologue”: the first seven hundred lines which comprise the imbricated narrative of Calogrenant. The mention of himself in the third person is not unusual; it appears in the Prologue to almost all of his other works. It is almost as though medieval authors recognized the implicit problem with the sliding performatives of Benveniste: if they merely said “And so I finish my story,” the narrator doing a later reading of the text would be taking the credit for the story. Nor is it surprising that we find only his name here and not a list of works also produced or translated by Chrétien (although other prologues of his do give a sort of a *curriculum vitae*); it is almost certain that Chrétien would have expected an audience to know his name. What is unusual, however, is that this auto-reflexive textual closure offered by the author is the first—and only—time that the name appears.

How, then, does the framing device of Chrétien’s name work? By placing his name at the end of the text, Chrétien is lending to his text a certain symbolism. Since legal texts were the one type of text which placed the author’s, or the *witness’s* name at the end, the incorporation of Chrétien’s name at the end lends a certain legal connotation. It is as though his name is more than a name; here it

seems to be a signature, proof of a certain identity, and proof of the text's validity and truthfulness. The lack of designation and of description (the *curriculum vitae*, further proof of Chrétien's identity as a writer) highlights the impact of the solitary name, the signature. The name in effect stands guard over the text, thus guaranteeing its genuineness. Chrétien's textually fixed and implicitly non-duplicable identity is presented as the authority to which the text refers/defers itself. It is also worth noting that the signature placed at the end of the text implies the concurrent development of a legal system or system of government which would track individuals according to their proper name, and which would judge a document as authentic based on the authenticity of the signature. By signing the text in this fashion, it is as though Chrétien is saying that from his point of view, this is the correct version of the story. The (apparent) wish for textual authority at the end seems very marked in contrast to the political lack of authority held by King Arthur, the king who holds such little authority that he must resort to word games to bring about justice.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, a third voice comes along to further nail down the narrative frame. This third voice belongs to the scribe Guiot, who adds an epilogue—spaced apart from the body of the text—onto the text itself:

Cil qui l'escrist Guioz a non;  
devant Nostre Dame del Val  
est ses ostez tot a estal. (Roques 207)<sup>11</sup>

Guiot's addendum is highly ludic and not a little ironic. By picking up on the game of (pretension to) textual authority started by Chrétien's authorial voice, Guiot blatantly breaks the textual limit set up by Chrétien, which states: "n'onques plus conter n'en oï / ne ja plus n'en orroiz conter / s'an n'i vialt mançonge ajoster" (6806-6807). What Guiot adds to the text, however, is not additional "story" text, but rather a further identification and affirmation of the means of textual production. Just as Chrétien assures/informs the reader that he, indeed, is the author, so does Guiot assure us that he, Guiot, was the copyist. He thus further adds to the text's "pedigree," all the while assuring us that the text presented here, which was written in all its "correctness" by Chrétien, has been

copied correctly by Guiot. The text we read is doubly "correct" and free from *mançonge*.

Textual authority and authenticity are both at stake. Implicit behind these desires is both the fear that the text will be changed, and the seeming certainty that without a textual "authority," the story will be altered. The threat of textual change comes from future scribes or would-be revisionists, rather than from future readers. In fact, the very ambiguities that Chrétien placed in the work for future narratee to interpret are what he wishes to preserve. With no definitive prologue to situate the reader, and with characters which straddle the line between intra- and extradiegesis, the text of the *Yvain* stands as something to be actively interpreted by the reader. Clearing up the ambiguities would remove many of the issues central to the work, and would mean that the reader's path through the text would no longer mirror Yvain's arduous journey and rebuilding of self through the second half of the text, the text itself implying that it is precisely because of Yvain's lack of analysis or of challenge in the first half which provokes and *necessitates* the second half.

Textual veracity and authenticity is the battleground in this text which transmits its values by means of narrative framing devices and narratorial status rather than by purely discursive language. Also at stake is the status of the author's name as signature. Perhaps this is not unusual in a text which deals with subjectivity, and especially subjectivity as it is forming itself in a culture where the presence of the written word, the signature, is integrating itself with the oral oath sworn in a court of law or to one's liege. The shifting status of the narrator between the intra- and extradiegetic worlds is also reflective both of the dual presence of oral/written narrative and the dependence of the text on narrative structure to pass judgment and to transmit meaning. After analyzing the placement and manipulation of narrative functioning in the *Yvain*, it is clear that poetics and narrativity are the dominant discourses, and the most appropriate discourses available for the topic of an individual's insertion into the text of early medieval society.

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## Notes

1. Witness the case of Laudine, who prudently withholds the information from her vassals that Yvain was indeed the killer of Esclados. By thus manipulating the content of her narrative, she manages to guarantee the outcome that she desires; namely, the vassals' consent to her remarriage to Yvain.

2. It can also be pointed out that Gauvain's "disappearance" (literal and figurative) from the text mirrors that of Yvain's disappearance from the court of Laudine and from human society during his madness.

3. A. J. Minnis presents four varying forms of the prologue in ancient and medieval Latin literature and scholastic culture. These prologue forms, in turn, greatly influenced nascent forms of vernacular medieval literature, and hence, prologues. See chapter 5, "Literary Theory and Literary Practice" for a look at these emerging vernacular literary forms.

4. For further reading on the creation of love in the twelfth century, see Bloch. For interpretations of Chrétien de Troyes, see in particular chapters 5 and 6, "The Old French Lay and Male Modes of Indiscretion" and "The Love Lyric and the Paradox of Perfection."

5. For further discussion of the role to be played by the narratee of Chrétien de Troyes, see Ollier, Vance, and Hanning.

6. The role to be played by the future narratee is highlighted in the prologue to Marie de France's *lais*. Here the reader is told that the Ancients purposely made their words ambiguous so that future readers would be able to come along and add their *savoir* to the words. Clearly, as with Chrétien de Troyes, the issue of reader participation is linked strongly to narrative truth.

7. This idea of a structure which is continually (re)appearing and disappearing will be further examined in relation to narratorial interruption.

8. This ending is highly transparent, and can be compared to a much earlier scene where the text depicts Calogrenant's listeners as being shocked and surprised by the *honte* associated with his story. This scene can be seen to foreshadow the Yvain's narratee's surprise at the upcoming actions of Yvain. I would argue that these scenes are meant precisely to offer to the reader their appropriate response to the text.

9. Tony Hunt comments briefly on the awkwardness of the ending caused precisely because the past problems and ironies have been swept away. I argue, however, that not all of the issues have been resolved, and that we must closely examine those "narrative functions" left out of the "frame" at the end.

10. Although Lunete and King Arthur both use the same kind of word trick to achieve certain goals, one must note that Lunete is in a subordinate position with reference to the object of her trickery, whereas King Arthur is (in theory, if not in practice) subordinate to no one in the story. Thus, Lunete's trickery is a means for her to become more powerful by giving her access to a power she normally would not have, whereas King Arthur's tricks merely underscore his lack of power and efficacy in the political realm.

11. In most editions these three lines are not numbered since they are presumed to be written by someone other than Chrétien de Troyes. I have designated these lines with the modern editor's name.

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# **Marcel Proust: Nietzschean (*Künstler*)-Übermensch**

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*Kimberly Carter-Cram*

Only as an aesthetic phenomenon are the world and the being of man eternally justified.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

I believe that there exist striking coincidences in Nietzsche's ideal of the *Übermensch* as one who is able to overcome the malaise of the modern man—nihilism, and in Marcel Proust, author, creator and philosopher. I propose that Marcel Proust is in fact an example of a Nietzschean *Übermensch* who overcomes not only the malaise of nihilism, but also the terror of the *fin de siècle* which accompanies the sickness. Proust, as author and creator, fills the role of Nietzsche's absent God and takes it upon himself to harness the 'will to power' to create not only art, but a deeply personal reality for himself and his characters through his writing.

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is one who is able to master himself and control this 'will to power' as Art. Art, for Nietzsche, is not an expression of culture but of what Heidegger calls "eine Gestaltung des Willens zur Macht," a manifestation of the will to power. The will to power is not a thing nor is it a power over others. It is, however, both conscious *and* unconscious and is reserved for the domain of Being and Becoming with which we are most familiar, that is, the domain of life. It is the *essence* of being itself, that is, a manifestation of being as a whole. The will to power is thus not objective, it is *subjective* and as such, *existential*. The will to power is a sort of energy in motion, an activity which continually tries to master and put a certain order on ideas as *interpretation* of those ideas.

According to Nietzsche, no ideas, no things in and of themselves can exist independently of the interpretations applied to them by an individual acting as interpreter. In the *Will to Power* he writes:

One would like to know what things-in-themselves are; but behold, there are no things-in-themselves! . . . In short, the essence of a thing is only an *opinion* about the "thing," . . . The origin of "things" is wholly the work of that which imagines, thinks, wills, feels. . . . Even "the subject" is such a created entity . . . (#555 & #556)

To the extent that there can be no things-in-themselves (ideas, self [as subject], etc.) it becomes necessary, therefore, to have one who *interprets* in order to *impose* meaning upon things. These interpreted 'truths' can be expanded into multiple interpretations, but they are all made by a subject who exists grammatically as subject to the action of interpretation.

This interpretation must in turn be made *pragmatically* according to the interpreter's needs. In other words, the interpretation must have some sort of value for life in an *existential* sense, that is, for the life of the individual making and using the interpretation. The interpretation or attempt to shape or impose unity on phenomena which previously had none is a manifestation of the will to power and potential solution to the modern malaise known as nihilism.

However, few are actually able to harness the will to power and use it to interpret (or, in other words, to impose meaning upon) the things which surround them, and fewer still are able to use it to interpret ideas or the subject as self. Thus, those who *are* able to use the will to power are exceptional, are 'super' people, that is, *Übermenschen*. Nietzsche proposes that the artist is the prime example of this *Übermensch*. (However, it must be noted that not all artists qualify as *Übermenschen*: Wagner does, but *none* of the Parnassiens, the poets who believed in *l'art pour l'art* ['art for art's sake'] are eligible).<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, art is known as "the *expression of being itself*, no longer grasped by abstractions and pure reason, but by what we sense and feel" (Pfeffer 206, my emphasis).

The artist as *Übermensch* becomes the first to offer hope of a solution out of the nihilistic malaise. Art is offered as the "counter-movement" (WP #794) to nihilism: Nietzsche would like "art and nothing but art! *It is the great means of making life possible*, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life" (WP #853:II, my emphasis). Art becomes known as the expression of "a victorious will" (WP #800). What is left is the *Übermensch* as maker of images: in his aesthetic creativeness alone lies the essence of man.

Consequently, in Nietzsche's view it is the *artist* who is thrust into the God-like role of making life "possible," and of "stimulating" life. The artist as *Übermensch* becomes an interpreter in an existentially pragmatic sense: "A new pride my ego taught me, and this I teach men: no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates meaning for the earth" (TZ 32, my emphasis). The *Übermensch* uses the will to power as *Art* to interpret, or impose meaning on 'things' which will affect him personally, in particular, the subject, his own 'Self.' Indeed, Man becomes the creator-god who in his productive activity experiences a oneness with being itself. "In art a certain absoluteness of existence is in fact arrived at by man" (Hofstadter 606).

When Nietzsche declares God "dead," the path is opened for the *Übermensch* to become *self-creating*, indeed *life-creating*. Nietzsche proposes that if man is to do without God, he will have to replace Him by somehow becoming the creator of himself. According to Duncan Large in his article on the necessity of the literary self, "man's will to creativity is embarrassed by the existence of any God" (54). Large quotes Nietzsche as saying:

"Wir aber wollen die werden, die wir sind—die Neuen, die Einmaligen, die Unvergleichbaren, die Sich-selber-Gesetzgebenden, die Sich-selber-Schaffenden!" Nietzsche writes: "als Interpreten unserer Erlebnisse": artist is both mother and child, and the world a self-creating work of art by the hand of man (54).<sup>2</sup>

This process of 'becoming' involves an *artistic* ideal, one which, for my purposes, will involve only literary paradigms. Consequently, the '*Künstler-Übermensch*' (my term) uses the will to power to make a work of art of *himself*. J.P. Stern highlights:

[t]he totality which, for [Nietzsche], justifies that art is Life [sic]. To prevent this undefinable, ineffable notion of "Life" from turning into the static pre-Socratic idea of "Being" or *Sein*, he characterizes "Life" as an eternal process of change, of "Becoming," or "Werden." Its agent . . . is "the Will to Power." (150)

This god-like position of the author as creator has been much discussed in the 20th century and Nietzsche himself admits to the specialized necessity of author as God-figure in the 1886 preface of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*: "In der Tat, das ganze Buch kennt nur einen Künstler-Sinn und—Hintersinn hinter allem Geschehen,—einen 'Gott,' wenn man will" ("Versuch einer Selbstkritik" 5).<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that first and foremost, the author does indeed function as a sometimes omniscient, typically omnipotent creator. He is an inventor of the Other: of characters, situations, and ideas. However, in spite of the author's best efforts to the contrary, the reader is only too aware of the fact that the characters of the novel (who function as multifaceted, 'real' people within plots and story-lines) are contingent upon the author's whim and will.

The author has a second godly function in the world of Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch*: that is, the realization of the will to power as power to create beauty through art. The creation of beauty is a sign of the strength of the artist. It is a proof of the artist's ability to fuse the Apollonian (the visual) and the Dionysian (the "orgiastic") conditions of art together into one clear unity resulting in Nietzschean 'pleasure,' 'intoxication' or 'an exalted feeling of power' at his creation. Richard Bales suggests that it is Marcel, the narrator of *Le temps retrouvé*, who, "après avoir reçu l'impulsion définitive offerte par la grande série de moments bienheureux, s'est résolu à transmuer sa vie en *action artistique*" (12).

The artist's third and perhaps most significant role as Künstler-*Übermensch* is to create *himself* through the will to power: he must interpret or impose meaning on the thing which is the closest to him: his *own Being*. The artist must constantly re-interpret himself; his life is an unending metamorphosis. Thus, the interpreted meaning will *necessarily* be in continual flux. If a state of stability is reached, the artist will no longer be in control of the will to power, no longer 'be' becoming. He will stagnate and no longer be considered an *Übermensch*.

I intend to examine the work of Marcel Proust through the Nietzschean philosophical lens I have just described. As both artist and creator, Proust harnesses the will to power and uses this strength to impose a sense upon the fictional world of his massive novel, thus creating a meaning for his narrator, Marcel, whose fictional life mirrors the meaning Proust imposes upon his own life.

At the same time, Proust imposes meaning upon his own selfhood, thus creating a very personal reality of his own.

The relationship between Marcel the narrator and Proust the author is indeed problematic. One can never know for certain an author's intentions in writing, and, if we accept conventional wisdom, we accept that Marcel Proust did not intend his 'Marcel' to be an autobiographical character. However, insofar as Proust did create a narrator (Marcel) whose role within the novel is as interpreter of meaning, and insofar as it is Marcel's function to make life possible both for himself as well as for the other characters of the story, I believe that the narrator and Proust serve a common artistic goal. Both function within Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* as writers, thus, as creators, who write in an effort to impose meaning upon themselves and upon the world which surrounds them. Therefore, in my interpretation of Proust's *œuvre*, I view Proust himself as artist and philosopher and Marcel as both artist and *porte-parole* for Proust's philosophy on literature, memory and art.

Art, for Proust, re-creates the *essence* of the individual. This essence is constantly in a forward motion and is never stable. Proust's philosophy on memory supports the idea that it is through art alone that we are able to emerge from ourselves. His entire philosophy involves creating a present 'self' through the past, accessed through memory, which is either *volontaire* or *involontaire*.

The *mémoire volontaire* describes the exercise of actively recalling events from one's past, thus *actively* bringing the past into the present, whereas the *mémoire involontaire* characterizes a more spiritual, subjective, and almost metaphysical means of remembering. The *mémoire involontaire* is not a chosen act of remembering; rather, it is an involuntary 'leap' in the mind's time brought upon the individual as the result of external stimuli. Those familiar with Proust's work and the concept of the *mémoire involontaire* will immediately draw to mind some of the most well-known examples of this phenomenon: the madeleine cake, the *pavé* of the streets, the sonnet by Vinteuil. All of these stimuli (tasting the cake, feeling the *pavé* beneath his feet, and hearing the sonnet) serve to throw Marcel's mind and thoughts back in time to a previous encounter with those objects:

Mais tout à coup ce fut comme si elle était entrée, et cette apparition lui fut une si déchirante souffrance qu'il dut

porter la main à son cœur. C'est que le violon était monté à des notes hautes où il restait comme pour une attente . . . et avant que Swann eût le temps de se dire: "C'est la petite phrase de la sonate de Vinteuil, n'écoutons pas!" tous ses souvenirs du temps où Odette était éprise de lui . . . s'étaient réveillés et . . . remontés lui chanter éperdument, sans pitié pour son infortune présente, les refrains oubliés du bonheur . . . il revit tout . . . [et] . . . à ce moment là, il satisfaisait une curiosité voluptueuse en connaissant les plaisirs des gens qui vivent par l'amour. (AS 208)

It is the narrator's opinion that he can capture the turmoil of emotions which accompany the re-living of a past love. Through writing, the event can be captured *as reality* and therefore *create* a (present) reality from past experiences in the mind of the perceiver. It is an attempt at the artistic creation of an ordered world *for oneself* from the disorderly everyday world. Nietzsche believes that the artist:

cannot endure (the present) reality, he looks away from it, back: he seriously believes that the value of a thing resides in that shadowy residue one derives from colors, form, sound, ideas; he believes that the more subtilized, attenuated, transient a thing or a man is, the more valuable he becomes. (WP #572)

We have seen through Marcel that art, indeed the art of writing past emotions and sensations to create reality, holds a deeply personal meaning according to and for Proust. It must impose a sense upon 'things' and upon the 'subject' by creating them from past experiences. This creation of reality, indeed, creation of Self, is a manifestation of the Nietzschean will to power as art; it is a manifestation of the creation of a deeply personal reality *for oneself* which is, at the same time, both *pragmatic* and *existential*.

In taking a closer look at Proust's *œuvre* we can see that the artist wants to attest to the superiority of the mind and to the individual's potential to overcome the constraints imposed upon him by space and time. There are three major recurrent themes throughout this seven volume work: the first is the notion of time and of memory (a faculty Proust calls "la génératrice féconde") (AS 237) and of how to 'create' one's life through remembrance and memory. The second is the structure of the novel itself, which, in its

expansion and contraction, can be compared to the crescendos and decrescendos of a piece of music. Finally, the concept of love, which, as Proust explains it, can exist only as a creation in one's mind.

According to Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* must 'interpret' all [three] ideas *as art* in order for them to hold any meaning whatsoever. This interpretation *must* in the end be pragmatic, having some practical and personal use for the interpreter. In other words, the interpretation must be subjective, and thus, as previously mentioned, existential.

Such is the case with *A la recherche du temps perdu*. All of these themes (time and memory, structure of the novel and love) are in fact interpreted by Proust in order for them *to hold meaning for him personally*. The artist's interpretation creates a reality which is distinctly his own. And, these interpretations are *created* solely through the art of literature, which, as art, imposes beauty and pragmatic meaning upon phenomena which would otherwise hold no meanings-in-themselves.

The concept of love as it is treated and interpreted by Proust is an incurable malady which reveals to us, layer after layer, the material of which we are made. Love in Proust's novels figures in many ways: the love of a small boy for his mother, the love between women, between men, between men and women. However in nearly all cases, love is an obstacle to the creation of reality. Nietzsche calls love "a kind of sport [which] furnishes an obstacle and a provocation" (WP #120). It becomes a convenient excuse for the lover to be in love; he substitutes love for his search for reality, for truth. Thus, love becomes that which blinds the characters to reality and sets them upon a quest for possession of the Other, as is the case with Swann's pursuit of Odette in *Un amour de Swann*: "[un simple croquis] bouleversait Swann parce qu'il lui faisait tout d'un coup apercevoir qu'Odette avait une vie qui n'était pas tout entière à lui . . ." (76).

However, as is always the case with Proust, Künstler-*Übermensch*, love is also always in the memory of the characters in love. Thus, it is only through writing that love that it (and the characters who live it) can become "their" reality:

A cette époque de la vie, on a déjà été atteint plusieurs fois par l'amour; il n'évolue plus seul suivant ses propres lois

inconnues et fatales, devant notre cœur étonné et passif. Nous venons à son aide, nous le faussons par la mémoire, par la suggestion. En reconnaissant un de ses symptômes, nous nous rappelons, nous faisons renaître les autres. (AS 18)

Accordingly, it is “la terrible puissance créatrice de (la) mémoire” (AS 237) which recalls love, *imposes meaning* upon love and creates it as reality through the art of literature. Nietzsche’s artist-creator takes “chaotic matter that is full of tension and Dionysian [“orgiastic”] excess and shapes it into an artistic unity” (Pfeffer 205). This is exactly what is meant by the will to power *as art*.

One of the most striking examples of this phenomenon is found in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* when the narrator recalls his grandmother:

En tous cas si elles restent en nous, c'est la plupart du temps dans un domaine inconnu où elles ne sont de nul service pour nous, et où même les plus usuelles sont refoulées par des souvenirs de l'ordre différent et qui excluent toute simultanéité avec elles dans la conscience. Mais si le cadre de sensations où elles sont conservées est ressaisi, elles ont à leur tour ce même pouvoir d'expulser tout ce qui leur est incompatible, d'installer seul en nous, le moi qui les vécut. Or comme celui que je venais subitement de redevenir n'avait pas existé depuis ce soir lointain où ma grand-mère m'avait déshabillé à mon arrivée à Balbec, ce fut tout naturellement, non pas après le premier soir d'autrefois, que j'adhérai à la minute où ma grand-mère s'était penchée vers moi. Le moi que j'étais alors et qui avait disparu si longtemps, était de nouveau si près de moi qu'il me semblait . . . que je n'étais plus que cet être qui cherchait à se réfugier dans les bras de sa grand-mère. . . . (154)

As art, the structure of the novel itself is a manifestation of the will to power. It is only by going beyond the *loi causale* in his work of art that Marcel can restore to his life a sense of organic continuity. Large writes that it is metaphor which “bridges the gap which separates present from past, synthesizing the two in an experience of joyful simultaneity, and the victory over Time is completed by Proust with the recursive structure of the *Recherche* itself” (59).

For Proust (and thus, as *porte-parole* of Proust’s ideas, for Marcel as well) the fundamental task at hand in writing is the search

for a 'reality.' The lifeline for which they search is simply an order, a meaning to a seemingly disordered, godless world. The order is found in the creation of Self through art, that is, through literature. This process of creating (of *self-creating*) is entirely personal and unique to the *Übermensch*. There can be no God upon whom to rely in Nietzsche's philosophy. Proust himself writes that:

quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus . . . , pour la lecture desquels personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer ni même collaborer avec nous. (TR IV, 458, qtd. in Large)

Thus, Proust argues that the artist must take full responsibility for his work and for himself. This is equally true of Marcel, the narrator of Proust's novel. It is a singular situation: that the author (Proust) should, in his effort to create *himself* through the creation of a work of art, create in that work of art a character who, although 'fictitious,' nearly exactly mirrors his own life experiences, desires and needs. It is as though the author needed to create a companion, an imaginary friend of sorts, who would serve as the memory for the theory that memory creates present reality.

Let us examine more closely a striking example of the creation of a personal reality for oneself through memory. As has already been suggested, Marcel and Proust both are able to use the involuntary memory and art to their advantage to create a sense of self. Through the involuntary memory given to Marcel by Proust, the narrator is able to re-experience the sensations of moments of the past as an intangible reality. As he reflects on this identity of past and present sensations, he penetrates to the *essence*: Reality, he sees, is the imposed spiritual *significance* of all that we experience in life. For example, it is only through memory that Marcel is able to live the reality of his grandmother's death:

Je retrouvais dans un souvenir involontaire et complet la réalité vivante. Cette réalité n'existe pas pour nous tant qu'elle n'a pas été recréée par notre pensée (sans cela les hommes qui ont été mêlés à un combat gigantesque seraient tous de grands poètes épiques); et ainsi, dans un désir fou de me précipiter dans ses bras, ce n'était qu'à l'instant—plus d'une année après son enterrement, à cause de cet

anachronisme qui empêche si souvent le calendrier des faits de coïncider avec celui des sentiments—que je venais d'apprendre qu'elle était morte. (SG 153)

Thus, events, emotions, human contacts and our relations to them, are successive, that is, diachronic, but reality, which can be disengaged from them all, transcends time and is universal, or synchronic.

Marcel further realizes that this essence awaits the expression that only the writer can give and that writing is the vocation for which his whole life has been in preparation. He must now seek, in the depths of his consciousness, the *vraie vérité* of his life and convert it by writing into its spiritual equivalent.

Through writing his life Proust begins to realize that human normalcy is *langagière*, that human life is language as the meaning that language imposes upon life. Eventually, for Marcel, and therefore for Proust as well, reality becomes only that which is able to be interpreted, that is, 'named' through the art of language. Thus, according to Proust's philosophy as it is communicated through Marcel, we are only that which the art of language imposes upon us. In order for us to exist at all, there must be language, indeed, there must be creation of man through language, that is, through literature.

However, in Proust's situation, any existence created through literature is fiction. What can that say of the life that he has chosen to create for himself? Is it all a lie? Has he thus 'nihilated' himself? We must remember that given the philosophy revealed through Marcel, in writing *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust created a sense of self, imposing a meaning upon *himself for himself* through art, and specifically through literature. But, as this literature is fiction, can we say that the 'Self' he creates is also a fictional text? a lie?

According to Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is permitted certain untruths insofar as he remains true to himself. Therefore, while it is true that what Proust has finally created is indeed a lie, a fiction, that does not necessarily mean that he is false to *himself*. That is to say:

for Nietzsche, the apparent world is the only world that there is, and the idea that there is a Real fixed eternal world he called a lie, or, to put it in Nietzsche's sometimes more tactful terminology, their intellect is an instrument but what it

produces are fictions. So he wrote: 'Untruth is a condition of life'. (Chessick 72)

As stated earlier, Nietzsche rejects the possibility of an absolute truth. There are no 'things-in-themselves,' that is, *nothing* has any meaning until meaning has been imposed upon that thing by an interpreter. This definition *includes* the Self or the subject. What we are left with then, is a possibility for an individual truth, for a 'relativity of truth' if one will. Truth becomes subjective *as long as* it is utilitarian and meets the needs of the interpreter.

Is this not exactly what Proust has done? About *A la recherche du temps perdu* Large writes that "there is not a single incident which is not fictitious, not a single character who is a real person in disguise . . . everything has been invented by him *in accordance with the requirements of his theme*" (52). In *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Proust himself writes that "à n'importe quel moment que nous la considérons, notre âme totale n'a qu'une valeur presque fictive . . ." (153). Therefore, the lie, for Proust, is the most necessary means of self-preservation, it is one of the few things in the world that can open windows for us on to what is new and unknown about ourselves.

Is Marcel Proust an example of the *Übermensch*? He is able to harness the will to power and impose meaning on things which otherwise would have no sense for and of themselves. Through the art of writing, he is able to create meaning not only for his own life, but for the lives of the characters of his novels. Proust is an *Übermensch* in that he is able to overcome the 'modern malaise' of nihilism, the sickness which allows nothing of value outside that which is imposed upon it by an exterior force.

While it is true that what he creates would seem to destroy itself in that it is only *one of many possible interpretations*, and that as such, it can never be 'true'; it is also the *very condition* of life that it be untrue and have no value other than that imposed by an interpreter. We can therefore categorize the force behind his language as *subject*; Proust *does* achieve his existential goal of creating reality and Self through writing. It is *his* reality, indeed, a deeply *personal* reality. Indeed, it is the *nature* of all things that their meaning be conditional, and it is only the (Künstler)-*Übermensch* who has the power to create things and to create *Self* by imposing a meaning upon them through the exercise of the will to power.

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### Notes

1. Artists who believe in the idea of *l'art pour l'art* cannot be called *Übermenschen* as their art is not practiced with the intent of creating a pragmatic and existential meaning for themselves as individuals but rather for the creation of beauty through art.

2. "But we want to become who we are—the new, the unique, the unrivaled, the self-ruling, the self-creators! . . . as interpreters of our own experience . . ." (Qtd. in Large, my translation).

3. "Indeed, the whole book knows only one artistic mind—a motivating force behind all that happens—a "God" if you will" (my translation).

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# Le féminisme de Marcel Prévost ou l'art de la mystification

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Marcel Prévost, auteur très prolifique et influent en France entre 1889 et 1937, a écrit 28 romans, 16 recueils de nouvelles, contes et lettres et de nombreux articles dans la *Revue de France* qu'il dirigeait. On ne note pas vraiment de changement radical au cours de sa longue carrière, tant du point de vue des idées que du style. Peut-être voit-on un plus grand libéralisme entre ses premiers romans dont le discours et les structures, très mélodramatiques, suivent le courant naturaliste ambiant et ses romans des années 20 au ton plus affranchi qui décrivent des héroïnes indépendantes mais condamnées d'avance. Quoi qu'il en soit l'épée de Damoclès et sa damnation planent constamment sur son univers romanesque.

Très à la mode dans la haute bourgeoisie, Prévost conçoit son œuvre dans un esprit de consommation. Le roman représente un capital matériel. Il est à la fois reflet de son époque et ligne de conduite à suivre. Afin de répondre au besoin de sa clientèle, issue de la bourgeoisie, souvent industrielle et peu cultivée, notre auteur suit la nouvelle vague de pensée du "catch all."<sup>1</sup> Son appartenance au "roman romanesque"<sup>2</sup> l'inscrit dans un important courant de la fin du siècle qui tente de freiner l'élan moderniste par un retour au réalisme abrupt à l'aide d'intrigues bien définies et de messages faciles à décoder. Sa littérature, destinée aux femmes oisives, reste un bien de consommation qui ne demande à être ni transcen-dé, ni interprété. Les romans de Prévost, faits pour le divertissement, semblent reproduire en tous points une mentalité d'époque.

A l'instar de la plupart de ses contemporains, Prévost s'est penché sur "la question féminine." Comme eux, il regarde la femme et elle lui est étrange et incompréhensible. L'impact de sa libération l'effraie et menace ses convictions, ce qui explique en partie son penchant au mécénat. En effet, auteur du nouveau concept de la jeune fille, Prévost s'est voulu le directeur de conduite des femmes en mal d'autonomie. Cependant, il insiste sur son rôle de "témoin-romancier" et veut nous convaincre de son entière objectivité:

Certes, je ne fus pas le seul, à cette époque, tenté par la même tâche. Ma spécialité, je crois, fut de l'entreprendre (à la différence de Paul Bourget) "sans doctrine préconçue." Ma formation scientifique, si imparfaite qu'elle eût été, m'évita sans doute cette "préconception" qui, je crois, gêne l'observation libre et directe. J'étudiai donc la femme de mon temps "objectivement." Et, particulièrement la jeune fille. (Prévost 45)

On retrouve dans son œuvre une forme particulière de féminisme qui se veut très ouverte et avant-gardiste mais qui en fait adopte toujours les attitudes du discours patriarcal. Dans l'univers romanesque, sa conception de l'action féminine s'étend des structures existantes comme le mariage, la maternité valorisée, jusqu'au monde du travail. On relève aussi toute une série d'idées sur les rapports amoureux de la femme<sup>3</sup> qui se doit de demeurer intègre et de conserver un esprit aussi virginal que possible. Les contradictions sont nombreuses chez Prévost: la femme est à la fois pécheresse et vierge égoïste; elle traîne l'homme noble dans la boue ou tente de s'affranchir de son pouvoir. En fait, quoi qu'elle fasse, la femme a toujours le mauvais rôle. Toute l'attitude du romancier réside dans cette ambivalence entre l'ange et le démon ou le conformisme et l'avant-gardisme.

L'œuvre de Prévost n'est pas particulièrement importante en soi. N'est-elle pas morte avec lui? Enfin aucun besoin ne se fait sentir pour la réédition de ses romans. Mais son discours nous est très précieux. Ce discours, qui est à la fois masque et reflet de son temps, reste un témoin d'une vision paternaliste en peine de pouvoir face à une montée féministe inquiétante.

Face à des textes trop souvent négatifs vis-à-vis des femmes, on comprend que Prévost n'ait pas surmonté l'épreuve du temps. En effet, son œuvre s'inscrit dans un système structural fermé. Or, selon le modèle de Laborit, la production d'idées au profit du pouvoir de la classe masculine et ne s'ouvrant pas sur une pluralité de perspectives est nécessairement vouée à l'oubli. Roland Barthes a déjà posé la question ainsi:

... Pourquoi le scriptible est-il notre valeur? Parce que l'enjeu du travail littéraire (de la littérature comme travail), c'est de faire du lecteur, non plus un consommateur, mais un producteur du texte. Notre littérature est marquée par le

divorce impitoyable que l'institution littéraire maintient entre le fabricant et l'usager du texte, son propriétaire et son client, son auteur et son lecteur. Ce lecteur est alors plongé dans une sorte d'oisiveté, d'intransitivité, et, pour tout dire, de sérieux: au lieu de jouer lui-même, d'accéder pleinement à l'enchantement du signifiant, à la volupté de l'écriture, il ne lui reste plus en partage que la pauvre liberté de recevoir ou de rejeter le texte: la lecture n'est plus qu'un *referendum*. En face du texte scriptible s'établit donc sa contre-valeur, sa valeur négative, réactive: ce qui peut être lu, mais non écrit: le *lisible*. (11)

A la lumière de ce passage de Barthes, on constate que les textes de Prévost ne sont pas "scriptibles" mais au contraire "lisibles," car ils ne laissent aucune marge d'interprétation. Répondant à des préoccupations de son époque, Marcel Prévost ne trouve plus un écho de nos jours. On ne parvient pas à lui substituer "de nouvelles intentions supposées, compatibles avec les besoins d'un public nouveau" (Escarpit 1968, 31). Car, selon Robert Escarpit, on présume que:

Peut-être l'aptitude à la trahison est-elle la marque de la "grande" œuvre littéraire. Ce n'est pas impossible, mais ce n'est pas certain. Ce qui est certain par contre, c'est que le vrai visage des œuvres littéraires est révélé, façonné, déformé par les divers usages qu'en font les publics qui les utilisent. Savoir ce qu'est un livre, c'est d'abord savoir comment il a été lu. (1968, 113)

Son but didactique était trop unidirectionnel pour avoir survécu à l'épreuve du temps.

C'est donc dans une perspective de réception que nous devons analyser le discours de notre écrivain. Les romans de Prévost, conçus selon le type narratif de la première personne du singulier sont une mise en situation de l'auteur lui-même. Afin de mieux comprendre la femme et par la suite transmettre son message, Prévost se sert d'une narratrice féminine. L'identification avec le/la lecteur/trice est ainsi facilitée. Ecouteons à ce sujet le fervent témoignage d'un contemporain de notre romancier:

M. Marcel Prévost n'est pas un proscriteur: c'est un spectateur passionné, un psychologue plein de feu, et en

même temps de sang-froid. Il a passé la plume à son héroïne. En la lisant, nous ne pensons guère à M. Marcel Prévost, car, vraiment, cette substitution n'est pas un simple artifice, la réussite d'une technique éprouvée; elle est, en quelque sorte, nécessaire, de cette nécessité qui est la marque des chefs-d'œuvre. (Granvilliers 350)

On comprend mieux, après l'étude d'un auteur comme Marcel Prévost, certains facteurs qui ont ralenti la marche du féminisme en France. Quoiqu'elle fût longue, cette marche n'a pas été prise au sérieux par les hommes. Le plus dramatique reste sans doute que de nombreuses femmes elles-mêmes ne l'ont pas considérée dans sa vérité, car des écrivains influents comme Prévost se plaisaient à entretenir une vision disloquée de la réalité. En exposant sans cesse aux lectrices leur culpabilité, la voie de l'expiation, la soumission et surtout l'interdiction à toute forme d'épanouissement, la littérature paternaliste agit à la manière d'un *leitmotiv* pour brimer l'aspiration féminine. Dans toute l'œuvre de Prévost, les vrais motifs se dissimulent sous des polémiques générales ou du romanesque afin d'influencer subtilement le lecteur. Si l'on prend le sens du mot féminisme, selon Simone de Beauvoir, on se rend compte qu'il signifie la volonté de changer les conditions de la vie des femmes. Prévost va à l'encontre de cette définition en gardant la femme enlisée dans les clichés du patriarcat. Un écrivain qui s'adresse à un public féminin, qui se dit maître dans l'analyse du cœur féminin, qui emprunte la voix féminine pour mieux atteindre sa lectrice et qui, même après avoir écrit un roman sur la cause féministe, tient toujours à garder la femme sous la tutelle du patriarcat, cet écrivain-là est un mystificateur. Il dupe son destinataire en présentant une réalité cachée qui diffère du projet initial. Pour Prévost, la femme est un être différent qui doit rester soumis et conserver son rôle traditionnel pour ne pas retirer le pouvoir à l'homme. Si l'on s'appuie sur la série de qualités qui opposent les hommes et les femmes dans l'œuvre de Prévost, on constate que toute la faiblesse est concentrée du côté féminin et la force du côté masculin. En obéissant à ce schéma, si la femme acquiert de l'autonomie c'est nécessairement au détriment de l'homme. Nous comprenons ainsi le vrai sens de l'opposition et de la complémentarité des deux sexes: pour éprouver son pouvoir, l'homme a besoin de croire à la faiblesse de la femme. Sans cette déficience féminine, le système patriarchal s'écroule. Prévost tient

encore à maintenir la femme dans son asservissement classique. Toute sa technique consiste à rester en dehors de la glose romanesque afin de ne s'attirer aucun blâme. Pour Marc Angenot:

Il s'agit de brider leur irrationalité sans les cabrer par la moralisation directe; de leur donner un minimum d'instruction sans leur reprocher une délicieuse ignorance .... Le beau style, les métaphores, l'indirect, le subjectif, les insinuations sont une preuve de respect pour la femme. Le genre littéraire féminin est le roman; style de la mièvrerie. (1037)

Ainsi le roman est à la fois le reflet de son temps, une influence pour modifier l'idéologie et un masque qui cache la réalité. En définitive, c'est le public qui a applaudi et dévoré ses ouvrages, car la critique est demeurée méfiante face à son succès soudain. Elle a perçu son cri désespéré qui tentait d'arrêter la marche du progrès pour la conservation du pouvoir.

Georges Pellissier peut nous servir de témoin dans la lutte de Prévost pour la dominance. Il s'est intéressé au romancier entre les années 1892 et 1905. Au début, le critique le louange et le trouve même original dans sa démarche:

Son esprit naturellement souple ne s'enferme pas, au surplus, dans une poétique exclusive. Ce polytechnicien n'applique au roman aucune formule. Il n'obéit guère qu'à ses propres impressions et au courant de ses souvenirs. (1892, 248)

Cependant il va lui reprocher de vouloir fonder l'école du "roman romanesque" en ne s'appuyant sur aucune idée précise. Pellissier souligne même son côté arriviste: "Peut-être s'inquiète-t-il aussi d'où le vent souffle" (1892, 248). Selon lui, le goût de Prévost pour la modernité, la nouveauté n'arrive pas à se réaliser. Tout en reconnaissant dans ses premières œuvres l'influence du naturalisme, de la pathologie et de la psychologie, il lui concède un talent véritable et comprend son succès et sa fulgurante popularité. Pellissier utilise de nombreux qualificatifs vagues dans sa critique, qui prend l'allure d'une envolée romantique:

Romanesque ou non, et de quelque manière qu'ils puissent l'être, les romans de M. Prévost méritent leur succès. Ils ont du naturel et de la grâce. Ils contiennent assez d'"idéal" pour nous distraire de ce monde, assez de "réel" pour ne pas nous le faire oublier. L'émotion y dégénère rarement en sensiblerie. Ils sont élégants sans fadeur, délicats sans trop de raffinements, distingués sans trop de manière. Ils ont le charme, et ni la vivacité ni la puissance ne leur font défaut. (1892, 253)

De même, il ne conteste pas à Prévost sa prétendue connaissance de la psychologie féminine et le qualifie de "moraliste le plus justement écouté de notre temps" (1892, 248). Pellissier le considère comme le spécialiste de l'étude des femmes, qui rend "avec une fidélité délicate et précise" certaines figures féminines (1892, 257). En 1892, le critique accepte la pensée de Prévost qui affirme que: "le fond même de la nature des femmes" révèle surtout "des aspirations irraisonnées et contradictoires" (1892, 257). Cependant, il trouve que Prévost applique cette idée de façon exagérée: "C'est de l'hystérie? À la bonne heure. Mais des cas pareils relèvent de la clinique" (1892, 257). Les héroïnes de Prévost que Pellissier juge comme des "créatures uniquement faites pour l'amour, dominées par leurs instincts, tout inconscientes" (1892, 257) sont à ses yeux coupables. En glorifiant la résistance des hommes et en ne ressentant aucune compassion pour la femme, Pellissier accepte la thèse de Prévost qui soutient que les pulsions, comme le désir de procréation, poussent souvent la femme aux actes les plus abjects: "Cette créature inférieure fait sa proie de quiconque se laisse prendre à ses fallacieux attraits" (1892, 263). Il perçoit la femme dans l'optique de l'auteur, c'est-à-dire: "l'éternelle corruptrice, la pierre de scandale posée sur la route de l'homme" (1892, 263). Prévost devient le secrétaire des femmes, capable de s'oublier pour rendre le ton approprié et vérifique de ses héroïnes. Pellissier se laisse entraîner dans la vraisemblance de l'univers romanesque. Il apprécie la méthode de l'auteur qui consiste à présenter d'abord les aspects négatifs afin d'indiquer dans la tourmente la voie à suivre:

Il prenait, pour enseigner le droit chemin, ce qui s'appelle, je crois, une méthode négative, en nous faisant connaître l'un après l'autre tous les chemins obliques, sauf à nous recommander de les éviter avec soin. (1892, 47)

Le critique insiste encore en 1895 sur le rôle capital du moraliste. L'écrivain a le devoir de former la gent féminine qui se complaît dans la lecture de romans sans s'arrêter à leur analyse. Le roman est donc aux yeux de Pellissier un véritable mécène auprès d'un public choisi. C'est pourquoi il reproche à Prévost de tronquer la réalité dans *Les Demi-Vierges* en mettant en scène des jeunes filles hors du commun. Sa réaction est justement voulue par le romancier qui tend à provoquer son lecteur pour lui faire apprécier le modèle de la jeune fille rétrograde:

Il y a encore la vraie jeune fille moderne, la jeune fille honnête sans grimaces, droite et vaillante, qui mépriserait sans doute le libertinage de Jacqueline et de Maud, mais que Jeanne ferait sourire avec son innocence transie. (Pellissier 1895, 60)

Mais on sent que la critique de Pellissier, commencée dans la pudeur et l'admiration, s'achève en 1901 dans l'amertume. Avec le temps, il démasque l'écrivain qui, sous des dehors de liberté, veut freiner la trop grande permissivité de l'éducation des filles. Il lui reproche aussi son intérêt à tirer profit de leur ignorance:

M. Prévost est tellement effrayé que, pour prévenir le mal, il recourt tout de suite au remède héroïque. Claquemurez vos filles. Voulez-vous être sûrs qu'elles ne vont pas chez Julien? Verrouillez leur porte, et, si vous n'habitez pas très haut, grillez leurs fenêtres. Il y a mieux encore: mettez-les au couvent. (1895, 42)

Il constate également que Prévost ne veut pas que l'état des choses change et que:

Au fond de ces romans, nous trouvons un grand mépris de la femme. Aussi bien tous les écrivains dits féministes affichent ce mépris, ou, quand ils ne l'affichent pas, le trahissent à leur insu jusque dans leurs hommages. (1895, 117)

Pellissier reconnaît d'une part le cheminement du romancier qui tend à attacher la femme à son maître, l'homme, jusqu'à l'étouffement. Et d'autre part, il critique sa tendance à ne présenter que des femmes vaniteuses, avides de loisirs, de luxe, de futilité, d'inanité: la femme "n'y a d'autres fonctions que d'être belle et

d'attirer les hommages" (1901, 119). Selon lui, les féministes qui réclament l'égalité doivent lutter contre les marques, évidentes chez certains écrivains comme Prévost, de superficielle déférence qui masquent "une estampille de leur servage" (1901, 117).

Pellissier entretient même l'espoir que la femme, grâce à un régime sain, se renforcera physiquement et perdra son appellation péjorative de "sexe faible" (1901, 120). Il la voit dans un proche avenir devenir la compagne et l'associée d'un mari de son choix; "et non plus une 'mineure' soumise à la tutelle de celui qu'on lui a choisi" (1901, 120). Selon Pellissier, c'est dans un monde plus libre et plus équitable pour les deux sexes, que les romanciers vont cesser d'analyser les "formes diverses que peut revêtir l'adultère" (1901, 120). Car les tabous, l'inégalité et les interdits engendrent le mensonge et l'hypocrisie. Enfin, Pellissier jette les hauts cris face à la montée d'une littérature qui parodie la femme. Il condamne surtout les sous-Prévost ou les sous-Bourget qui se multiplient et gagnent la faveur du grand public à cause de leur facilité d'accès:<sup>4</sup>

Quelque chose d'autrement grave, c'est que la peinture continue du vice finit par nous y habituer. Quelle femme peut respirer sans danger l'atmosphère d'une littérature où l'on ne lui montre pas une seule femme honnête, où toutes celles qu'on lui montre passent leur vie à changer d'amants? Elle s'acclimate tôt ou tard, et ce qu'elle regardait d'abord comme une honteuse dépravation, elle le trouve à la longue tout naturel. Et dès lors, qu'est-ce qui la retiendrait de faire comme les autres? Il y a bien certaines préfaces, où M. Bourget et M. Prévost donnent d'excellents conseils. Avant le poison, l'antidote. J'ai peur que l'antidote ne suffise pas à neutraliser le poison. (1905, 121)

En 1905, Pellissier revient à la charge en reprochant à Prévost d'occulter le véritable féminisme, qui ne se résume pas à la lutte opposant les deux sexes. Il a saisi l'aspect négatif des vierges fortes qui perdent le sens de leur cause en se détruisant elles-mêmes: "Je ferais tort à M. Marcel Prévost en laissant croire,—mais ne serait-ce pas un peu sa faute?—que *Les Vierges fortes* est un livre antiféministe?" (1901, 121). Mais ils s'est laissé gagner par le discours des idéaux; Pellissier s'englue dans le tissu d'idées positives où Prévost se montre l'allié des femmes pour mieux les manipuler. D'autres critiques plus directs, comme Alphonse Brisson, ont

immédiatement cerné les intentions du romancier. Avec beaucoup d'ironie, il n'hésite pas à tracer son portrait de moraliste auprès des femmes:

Il est deux moyens de gagner le cœur des femmes: ou les accabler de compliments, ou affecter de se moquer d'elles: les prendre par la tendresse ou par le dépit. Et le second procédé n'est pas le plus mauvais. M. Marcel Prévost en use, mais avec discrétion. (59)

Il saisit son mépris pour la femme: Prévost "ne voit en elle qu'égoïsme, sensualité, frivolité, vanité" (66). Néanmoins, il admire son style d'écriture "mâle" et "cavalier" "qui conquiert la sympathie et empêche l'attention de s'engourdir" (66). Il constate avec quelle facilité Prévost se détache de son texte grâce à son esprit "cérébral" et "froid," "rarement ému" (66). On se demande en lisant le jugement suivant, si Brisson admire ou condamne le romancier: "S'il n'est le plus sensible, il est le plus intelligent" (67).

En effet, intelligence il y a, car on trouve des signes du patriarcat dans toutes les structures narratives de Prévost, qui, très conscient, maîtrise ses impulsions et oriente son discours dans une direction bien déterminée. De plus, un univers romanesque régi par la loi du Père est une autre marque d'autorité masculine. À l'exemple de ses contemporains, Paul Bourget, Léon Daudet ou Victor Margueritte, entre autres, Prévost a tracé une image de la femme telle que perçue par les hommes. À travers de longues analyses, il tente de comprendre un phénomène qui lui paraît étrange, s'inscrivant ainsi dans les traditions des romans à thèse. Car il faut bien comprendre que dans la société patriarcale d'alors, la femme ne peut réclamer ses droits ou poser une action sans l'accord de l'homme. C'est ce dernier qui se penche sur la question et apporte les solutions souhaitées. Bien entendu, prisonnier du carcan de son éducation, il lui est impossible d'adhérer sans hésitation au féminisme.

On peut vérifier à l'époque de Prévost la théorie de Ellmann selon laquelle les hommes adoptent le ton autoritaire du savoir tandis que les femmes sont confinées au langage de la sensibilité. La pensée d'Hélène Cixous confirme également cette observation. Selon l'interprétation de Toril Moi, Cixous fait la distinction entre le langage masculin et le langage féminin ainsi:

The speaking woman is entirely her voice: "She physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body." Woman, in other words, is wholly and physically present in her voice—and writing is no more than the extension of this self identical prolongation of the speech act. (114)

Parler au nom de toutes les femmes reste une autre caractéristique patriarcale de Prévost. En prenant la voix féminine, l'auteur tente d'atteindre directement sa lectrice. Pourtant, ceci est une entreprise problématique, même dans le cas d'écrivaines qui s'imposeraient comme porte-parole d'autres femmes. Moi critique de tels efforts: "For one thing it is not an unproblematic project to speak for the other woman, since this is precisely what the ventriloquism of patriarchy has always done: men have constantly spoken for women, or in the name of women" (67-68). Assurément, aujourd'hui, la femme ayant une plus grande autonomie, la démarcation entre les sexes dans l'écriture ne se fait plus autant sentir. Mais à l'époque qui nous intéresse, sa présence est indéniable. D'une part, les femmes devaient adopter un pseudonyme masculin et imiter le style des hommes pour être lues. En profondeur se cachait la différence qui reflétait fidèlement la société: l'écriture étant surtout l'expression de son monde intérieur. Et d'autre part, suivant "l'herméneutique du soupçon" d'Elaine Showalter, ce sont en particulier les textes écrits par les hommes qui dissimulent leur divergence d'idées (Moi 75-76, ma traduction). On y décelle des contradictions, des conflits, des silences, des absences. En somme, les hommes, un peu perplexes, perçoivent la situation féminine de l'extérieur tandis que la femme vit son texte. Celui-ci transpire son expérience vécue. Ainsi, Colette adopte une écriture à la syntaxe renouvelée. Sous forme de confidences, elle libère ses émotions féminines. On n'y perçoit aucune leçon, seulement s'établit une communication avec le lecteur. Ecrivaine ironique, son discours laisse souvent entendre le rire dans l'âme. Son héroïne Claudine regarde d'un œil critique la société de son temps. Colette s'accepte entièrement; même les aspects négatifs de l'apprentissage social, comme la domination masculine, ne la rebutent pas. En définitive, sa prose reste personnelle. Elle suit le ton confidentiel de la douce ironie sans aucune prédication. En outre, on n'y voit pas de condamnation du narcissisme mais une acceptation de soi.

On peut même vérifier ce système de la différence entre une écriture d'homme et de femme chez d'autres écrivaines de l'époque

qui en étaient encore au stade de l'identification avec l'homme. D'abord Rachilde s'affirme dans la création d'images qui débordent la réalité. Son monde romanesque atteint le paroxysme de la folie: c'est sa façon de lutter contre les clichés patriarcaux qu'elle a intérieurisés. Tout en bâtissant un imaginaire dominé par la femme, Rachilde reste une féministe qui s'ignore. Dans son univers destrukturé, elle se plaît à tout faire éclater. Certains de ses romans tentent de revenir aux sources de l'humanité en refaisant la société à partir d'un homme et d'une femme primitifs. Rachilde vit sa condition féminine et ne se donne pas une mission, comme le font les hommes, d'enseigner à un lecteur curieux et capricieux. Son féminisme n'est pas vécu de façon militante mais de manière métaphorique à l'intérieur du paroxysme des descriptions: la mort rôde sans cesse et laisse présager, non pas le néant, mais la résurrection dans un état nouveau.

Enfin, Gyp s'apparente à Rachilde. Elle aussi se trouve au stade du refus des revendications féministes en s'identifiant entièrement à l'homme. Son pseudonyme est asexué:

Son désir de masculinité est même allé très loin puisqu'elle a fait de Gyp un personnage qu'elle conjuguait et accordait au masculin. Dans son esprit, la distinction entre Gyp et Gabrielle est évidente. Les jupons, les frous-frous sont gommés. (Ferlin 113)

Mais, malgré sa volonté apparente d'assimilation, dans ses romans, elle privilégie la jeune fille libre, franche, autonome, qui n'affiche aucune manière d'affectation ou de corruption. Physiquement, ses héroïnes ont souvent un gracieux corps musclé, affichant la beauté des lignes libérées du corset. La femme est aussi perçue de l'intérieur: à l'exemple de Chiffon toute sensible et sincère. Même la maternité, non pas accidentelle et répétée, reste un désir chez elle. Gyp critique les hommes faibles et aveugles de la société des aristocrates parvenus qui sacrifient souvent leurs jeunes épouses dans le but d'obéir aux exigences du chic. On rencontre également dans son univers, l'éclatement des valeurs traditionnelles: ainsi, Chiffon ne respecte pas sa mère qui ne le mérite pas.

Chez Gyp, il n'y a pas de propagande mais une recherche de naturel, de bien-être dans la condition féminine vécue avec plus de tolérance que ne le supposent les hommes. Il en ressort une recherche de soi et une attirance pour les valeurs traditionnelles repensées

selon les besoins personnels de la femme. Son écriture, caractérisée par le dialogue, se rapproche du théâtre ou du cinéma. Elle n'est pas tiraillée entre les valeurs du bien et du mal. Réagissant comme une femme, Gyp exclut le sentiment de culpabilité lorsqu'une de ses héroïnes se donne avec un amour sincère.

En résumé, on s'accorde avec Henri Laborit pour dire que le paternalisme est un système fortement hiérarchisé, fermé sur lui-même et qui s'approche de l'infantilisme. Il crée de faux besoins dans le but unique de favoriser un seul individu. On peut appliquer ce schéma à Prévost qui tend à vouloir garder le pouvoir et entraîne ainsi la faillite de son entreprise. Son discours fonctionne dans l'idéologie du temps, pour le public récepteur du moment, avec les mots et les tournures cautionnées par son époque. Il s'avère donc normal que le lecteur d'aujourd'hui ne s'intéresse plus à ce genre de littérature qui a perdu sa saveur originale: "Les discours à succès d'autrefois, à prestige vulgaire ou lettré, font penser à de la magie où la croyance perdue pour nous laisserait à nu les singeries des rituels" (Angenot 1101). Il ne faut pas non plus oublier que les écrivains de cette époque entraient dans une ère de matérialisme. Ils ne pensaient guère à la postérité; leur but visait la grande consommation d'un public avide de nouveautés. La certitude d'être mortels était compensée par "le succès mondain" (Angenot 1104): il suffisait donc d'être lu.

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### Notes

1. "du vite-lu et du vite-compris" (Angenot 977).

2. Appellation déjà mise en application par George Sand dans ses romans *Indiana*, *Les Beaux Messieurs de Bois-Doré* et *Le Marquis de Villemer*.

3. Nous utiliserons ce terme dans son sens générique en suivant l'exemple de Simone de Beauvoir: "Quand j'emploie les mots 'femmes' ou 'féminin' je ne me réfère évidemment à aucun archétype, à aucune immuable essence" (Beauvoir 2: 1). Notre but n'est que de démasquer un ensemble de clichés attachés à la condition féminine et non d'en créer de nouveaux.

4. C'est aussi un manque de confiance dans le jugement de la femme. Pellissier montre ainsi la limite de son ouverture d'esprit.

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## PUBLICATION ABSTRACT

Jean-Claude Carron (Editor)

*François Rabelais: Critical Assessments*

John Hopkins University Press (forthcoming)

*François Rabelais: Critical Assessments* consists of selected and revised essays delivered at the 1991 UCLA symposium that brought together internationally recognized Renaissance scholars and Rabelais specialists. Their work represents the cutting-edge research being done today in this interdisciplinary field.

Aside from providing an overview of the recent history of Rabelais criticism, the collection aims at providing an insight into current debates among the best known Renaissance scholars. From this point of departure, an exciting dialogue emerges around the more general issue of textual and contextual readings focused on Rabelais's work.

The collection brings together a number of critics who have found themselves at the center of an on-going debate about historical contextualization and interpretive strategies. It draws views from a variety of disciplines and methodological directions as represented by some of the best known specialists on the question today, on both sides of the Atlantic. Its strength lies in the way issues in contemporary theory open out from and return to one author and his unique comic text. Textual criticism grounds each contribution but leads as well to problems of literary, social, cultural, religious and philosophical history.

A number of recurrent topics are found in most papers, and addressed from different critical perspectives: the hermeneutic closure or opening of Rabelais's text, at the center of a recent critical debate, is to be found in all papers, but is especially at the heart of the contributions by Michael Allen, Gérard Defaux, and Michel Jeanneret; the "design" or composition of the text is studied by Edwin Duval, Raymond La Charité, Marc Bensimon, and Richard Regosin; François Rigolot and Jean-Claude Margolin draw upon the evangelical and biblical references of Rabelais's text in order to reassess the religious "position" of Rabelais. Terence Cave, Carla Freccero and Thomas Greene address different aspects of early modern low culture.

The collective response to the symposium was the realization that a meeting of minds had taken place which was able to redraw the map of Rabelais criticism and resolve some of the traditional misunderstandings between opposing points of view. By refusing to rehearse the closure of the clannish conflict between traditional and modern readings, the scholars are able to focus on the interpretation of Rabelais's text from a point of view free of sterile partisanship. The revised versions of the papers read at the symposium integrate a number of these insights, and the Editor's Introduction makes explicit the issues at stake.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Une analyse structurale de *Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur* de Mongo Beti

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Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Los Angeles, 1994

Professor Boniface I. Obichere, Co-Chair

Professor Eric Gans, Co-Chair

Faire une analyse structurale d'un texte littéraire, c'est étudier l'organisation structurale, les différentes idées et leur signification qui sont à l'origine de ce texte. Cette thèse fait une analyse structurale de *Perpétue et l'habitude du malheur* écrit par Mongo Beti en 1974.

Après avoir présenté l'espace socio-politique où s'est déroulé l'action du récit décrite par le romancier, la géographie physique, les assises historiques et religieuses du Cameroun, nous porterons notre attention sur la vie littéraire camerounaise. Puis nous verrons les interférences pré- et post-indépendances dans *Perpétue* et la vie sociale du Cameroun indépendant. Dans le dernier mouvement enfin, nous analyserons le contenu romanesque de *Perpétue*.

En conclusion, nous ferons le point des différentes parties en faisant ressortir le message que Beti veut communiquer à son lecteur dans *Perpétue*.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Textual Promiscuities: Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, Frances Burney and Choderlos de Laclos

Antoinette Marie Sol

Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Los Angeles, 1994

Professor Stephen Werner, Chair

This dissertation attempts to integrate two important women writers of the Eighteenth Century into the critical studies of Choderlos de Laclos. It is my thesis, presented in the first chapter, that Laclos draws upon the pre-sentimental novel of Riccoboni and the domestic novel as written by Burney to create his great novel.

Chapter Two examines how women were progressively written out of literary history and how Laclosian criticism excludes studies of women's works on an author who is recognized as owing a great debt to his literary forebears. It reviews traditional literary criticism's view that Crébillon, fils, Richardson, and Rousseau were the primary influences on Laclos and suggests that one must look to women's texts to complete the study of *Les liaisons dangereuses*. Chapter Three shows the connection between Riccoboni and Burney. Burney read Riccoboni and rewrote her. She drew upon specific episodes in Riccoboni's texts and expanded them in a more "realistic" mode. The violence and humor that is present but subdued in Riccoboni, is exaggerated in the younger Burney's text.

Chapter Four concerns Laclos's reading of Riccoboni. In a manner similar to Burney, Laclos exploited parts of Riccoboni's texts to create *Les liaisons dangereuses*. He drew upon characters and voices found in Riccoboni to create Merteuil, Tourvel, and Valmont. He exaggerated her characters, heightened the tension between conflicting ideologies, and extended situations present in Riccoboni's texts to the breaking point. Laclos's reading of Burney's *Evelina* is studied in chapter Five. Laclos used *Evelina* as a starting point for his novel. *Les liaisons dangereuses* is the product of Laclos's reading of Riccoboni and Burney (and indirectly a product of Burney's reading of Riccoboni). Burney's second novel *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress*, published within a few months of *Les liaisons dangereuses*, dealt with many of the same topics as the French novel. A paired reading of the two novels reveals the plight of the individual in a

corrupt society and the impossibility of a “happy” resolution as their common theme. This chapter explores the difference gender makes to the writing of novels and suggests that Laclos deliberately draws upon the “faulty” narrative strategy found most often in the novels written by women.



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